

**BID TIME RETURN**

**BY**

**ANNE WEALE**

For  
MALCOLM BLAKENEY

With my thanks for twenty-five  
years of exceptional happiness

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The four of them grew up together on Carlou in the Channel Islands – Andelys and Claudine, and Rupert and Simon. When they grew up, Claudine and Simon spread their wings and went away, but Andelys only wanted to stay for ever on the lovely island, with her adored Rupert. Then Claudine came back, for Rupert's coming-of-age party, and everything changed for Andelys . . .

## FOREWORD

Writers often are asked - 'Where do you get your ideas?'

The idea for this book has been in my mind for eight years, since the blazing June afternoon when, after scrambling up the orange-lichened rocks to the breezy summit of Hermetier, an islet off Herm Island, I sat among the bobbing clumps of sea pinks, looking across the sparkling tideways of Little Russel towards Castle Cornet and the busy harbour at St Peter Port.

Although there is no island called Carlou among the Channel Islands, the places I have described do exist. The steep cliffs and sheltered bays, the rock pools and caves, the old manor houses and granite cottages: they are all to be found on Sark, Herm and Alderney, and along the lovely, rugged south coast of Guernsey.

A. W.

## PROLOGUE

In the spring of the year when I was twenty-two and she was seventy, Clementine Wallace said to me, 'All my life I've wanted to see the château at Chenonceaux. I don't feel my age, but I can't count on being here next year. Shall we take advantage of this lovely weather and go at once? - Tomorrow morning?'

We were in the workroom behind the shop. Miss Wallace was cleaning a pair of Georgian silver spoons, carefully keeping her thumb over the hallmarks as people do when they understand fine old silver, for if the marks become 'rubbed' the value is reduced. I was busy at my embroidery frame, mounting on linen a fragile, moth-damaged sampler signed Sara Ebdon Fecit (the last word being Latin for 'she did it') and dated November 30, 1776. It was delicate work and until that moment I had been absorbed and contented. But when Miss Wallace spoke to me and I raised my head and looked down the long sunlit garden, suddenly I was filled with April restlessness.

'Why not?' I agreed, smiling at her.

Thus, with the freedom of women who have no husbands or children or even pets to consider, we told the police and the milkman,

and hung a card on the door to inform the trade and our private customers that Abbey Antiques would be closed for a week.

‘Your Mr Herault was on the telly again last night,’ said Mrs Evans, our cleaner, when I called at her house the next morning to leave the keys with her. ‘My Doreen thinks he’s a smasher. He hasn’t been here lately, has he? He used to come ever so regular, but it must be three months since the last time he came for the weekend.’

I avoided her inquisitive gaze, and said as casually as possible, ‘He’s abroad a great deal, Mrs Evans. The more successful he becomes, the less time he has for his private life. He writes to us fairly frequently, but we don’t expect to see much of him.’

In fact it was almost four months since Simon’s last visit to us, and three since my journey to London to attend a day-school at the Embroiderers’ Guild, and to deliver to Simon’s flat a birthday present from Miss Wallace.

The memory of the outcome of that errand still had the power to make my face burn. Quickly I said goodbye to Mrs Evans and returned along the village street to where Miss Wallace was waiting for me in the shooting brake.

She was having a chat with the postman, and as I slid behind the wheel I was dismayed to

see an airmail letter from Simon lying unopened on her lap.

She read it aloud as we started our journey to Dover. It began *My Dear Miss Wallace and Andelys*, and ended as usual, *Yours affectionately-Simon*. Like the majority of his letters to us, it had been written in mid-air and posted in a foreign city, this time from Berlin.

It was not the letter which disturbed me, for I knew there would be nothing in it but details of his current assignment, his opinion of various new books, and brief but vivid descriptions of people and places. It was our reply which worried me. In the past we had always taken turns to reply to his letters. But after what had happened in London I wanted nothing more to do with him. At the same time, I did not want Miss Wallace to know how matters stood between us. She loved us both, and was too old to bear the strain of divided loyalty.

‘We can write to him from Chenonceaux. It will be a change for him to receive an airmail letter from us,’ she said happily, as she slid the pages inside the envelope and tucked it in her bag.

‘Yes,’ I said. ‘Yes, it will.’ And then I changed the subject, and shut Simon out of my thoughts.

We reached the village of Chenonceaux the following day, in time for lunch. By three o’clock we were walking along a magnificent *allée* of

plane trees already in leaf. Ahead of us stood the graceful, grey-turreted château, like an illustration for a fairy tale.

I knew a little of its history. Miss Wallace knew everything concerning it. As we strolled about the neat walks of Diane de Poitiers' parterre garden, she told me how Diane had been married at fifteen to a man old enough to be her father, and then, at forty-four, had become the mistress of Henry II who was young enough to be her son. It was he who, in the summer of 1547, had given Chenonceaux to her.

'The Abbé de Brantôme says in his memoirs that when Diane was my age she was still as fresh and lovely as when she was thirty,' said Miss Wallace.

When we came to enter the château, we found that to wander in it at leisure was not permitted. We had to wait and join the next group to be admitted.

'I should like to come back at night and see it by moonlight,' said Miss Wallace, as we watched the waters of the Cher gliding under the great stone arches supporting the part of the building which spanned the river and was mirrored in its quiet surface. 'Do you think we could, my dear?'

'I don't see why not - unless they lock the gates. Look, it's time to go in'- as the tourists



who had been before us began to emerge into the sunshine.

The interior of the château smelt of hyacinths and beeswax. It reminded me of the library at Le Manoir and I felt a sudden pang of nostalgia. Even after four years in England, it was better not to think about Carlou, the island where I had grown up and from which I was now an unwilling exile.

I fixed my attention on the guide. Unlike some guides who take a pride in the treasures they describe, this man merely gabbled a set speech. It was uttered so fast and so monotonously that soon some Americans in the party began to mutter complaints. Fortunately Miss Wallace and I had no difficulty in understanding what he was saying. Among the governesses of her Edwardian childhood there had been a Mademoiselle. As for me, all the island children learnt to speak French, and when I was small my paternal grandmother was alive, and she had talked to me in the Norman-French *patois* which now had largely died out.

Within a quarter of an hour our tour of the interior was over and the guide had hurried us back to the wicket in the great door. Some of the party were sufficiently annoyed to ignore his outstretched palm. But Miss Wallace tipped him in spite of her disappointment.

‘Perhaps he is not feeling well, or has some trouble on his mind,’ she said, with her unfailing tolerance.

At the end of the drive there was a shop selling postcards and other souvenirs. I bought some colour slides of the richly decorated salons and the gallery over the river.

How was I to guess that the slides were to be my only memento of our holiday in Touraine? How was I to know that already, across the sea, something had happened which would disrupt my world for the second time? For four long, difficult years I had thought I was rebuilding my life; that I had changed, that I could not be hurt again. How little I knew myself.

We decided to spend the night at the hotel where we had lunched. After the proprietress had shown us to our rooms, Miss Wallace, who had missed her customary nap, said she would rest for half an hour.

When I had washed and changed, I took my book down to the courtyard to sit in the sun. I was reading *Lark Rise to Candleford*. As I was finding my place, Madame came out to inquire if I wished for a drink. I asked for a glass of Dubonnet. When she brought it, she offered me a newspaper left by another English visitor. It was a popular paper which did not appeal to me, but it seemed impolite not to glance at it.

The photograph of Claudine was on the back page. I had never seen her with the elaborate upswept hairstyle, but I recognised her instantly. Then I saw the headline below the picture.

## ISLAND PARTY ENDS IN TRAGEDY

### Hostess Falls To Death

*The death of raven-haired Lady Fontaine, 24, the glamorous French wife of Sir Rupert Fontaine, hereditary ruler of Carlou, one of the Channel Islands, is not the first tragedy to strike the wealthy family which has governed the unspoilt island paradise for four hundred years. In 1923, Sir Rupert's grandmother died of peritonitis during a violent storm which lashed the island for four days and prevented medical aid from reaching her in time. Her husband . . .*

I skipped the rest of the paragraph. I knew all about the Fontaine family's past tragedies.

*Lady Fontaine, the mother of a three-year old son, fell to her death after a party at Le Manoir, a forty-room mansion filled with treasures acquired by generations of seafaring Fontaines . . .*

I was still in a trance of disbelief when Miss Wallace came downstairs.

‘My dear child, what is the matter?’ she asked when she saw my face.

For answer, I handed her the paper.

As she finished reading it, Madame appeared. She looked faintly surprised when the frail-looking white-haired Englishwoman ordered two large cognacs.

I said numbly, ‘I can’t believe it. Dina dead . . . it doesn’t seem possible.’

Later, when I had pulled myself together, I tried to telephone my parents, but after a considerable delay the operator reported that the number was unobtainable.

We were having dinner by then, and when I returned to the table and told Miss Wallace, she said, ‘Tomorrow you must go home, Andelys. If we leave here first thing in the morning, you can drop me at Tours and drive to St Malo. There’s sure to be a garage where you can leave the car for a few days. With luck, you could be in Carlou tomorrow night or, if not tomorrow, the next day.’

‘But I can’t leave you stranded in Tours without any transport.’

‘I shall not be stranded, my dear. When I have finished exploring Tours, I shall take one or two coach excursions. You need have no worries

on my account.' She laid a gentle hand on my arm. 'You want to go to him, don't you?'

'Yes, of course I do, but - '

'Then you shall go. There's nothing to prevent it. I could come with you, but I won't. In circumstances such as these, outsiders are merely an encumbrance.'

'*You* are not an outsider, Miss Wallace.'

'Well, perhaps not quite that,' she agreed. 'But I am not an islander, and there is nothing I can do to help any of the people involved in this sad situation. Your presence will be a comfort and support to several people; to your parents as well as to poor Rupert.'

We went to bed early. I had forgotten Miss Wallace's wish to see the château by moonlight, and she did not remind me of it. In any case there was no moon that night. When I drew back the curtains and opened my window it was starting to rain.

The feather mattress was softer than my bed in England, and the square French pillow less yielding than my usual one. But it was not physical unease, or the pattering of the light spring rain on the leaves of the creeper round the window, which kept me awake. I could not sleep for the same reasons that I had not slept on a hot summer night four years ago.

Four years. Almost a fifth of my lifetime. Yet how short a time it seemed in retrospect. People

said that when one was old, one remembered one's youth more clearly than recent events. What should I remember when I was Miss Wallace's age?

Claudine had once said that everyone over forty should be put down, like old, useless dogs. She said it to shock me. Always she had enjoyed outraging my bourgeois outlook, as she called it. Now she was dead, all her brilliance and charm extinguished, leaving only a memory.

By midnight the hotel was silent. But although my body was tired and my eyelids heavy, my mind was still fretted by a dozen bitter-sweet recollections; all those moments of my life which I had tried so hard to forget, but which now came crowding back, still as painfully clear as if they had happened only yesterday . . .

# PART ONE

1940 – 1959

I was born at Ormer Cottage, on the island of Carlou, on June 28<sup>th</sup>, 1940, two days before Hitler's troops invaded Guernsey. I was called Andelys after my Guernsey grandmother, and Mary after my English mother. I inherited my surname, Brelade, from eight generations of Carlou fishermen.

A few weeks after the Liberation of the Channel Islands on May 19<sup>th</sup>, 1945, my father came home. He had been away for five years and eight months, serving in the Royal Navy. The first time I saw my mother cry was when he sprang from the launch to the jetty and folded her tightly in his arms.

At first I was shy and a little jealous of this tall, rough-cheeked stranger who looked so much older and more careworn than the smiling young man in the pre-war photograph on Mother's dressing-table. But soon it was as if he had always been with us.

Four of the island's young men, who upon the outbreak of war had gone to the mainland to enlist, did not return.

Rupert lost both his parents. His father's corvette was torpedoed in the Atlantic. His mother was killed in an air-raid on London. She had chosen to go to England with her husband, leaving one-year old Rupert in the care of his grandfather, Admiral Sir Helier Fontaine, Grantee of Carlou.

Dina was also a war orphan. Her father, Peter Rozel, had married a French girl he met while he was studying law at Caen University. He brought her to Carlou in 1938, and Dina was born the following spring. Peter Rozel was awarded a posthumous Military Cross for gallantry at Monte Cassino. Like my mother, Marie-Claude Rozel stayed in Carlou; unlike my mother, Marie-Claude could not endure the isolation of the island in winter, the staid company of her parents-in-law, and the sudden deprivation of everything which had made her life enjoyable.

In spite of severe food shortages, and the agonising anxiety of those who had no means of knowing whether their absent husbands and sons were still alive, the eighty-three adult inhabitants of Carlou were spared the worst part of the Occupation; the constant, oppressive presence of enemy troops, and the harrowing tales of the brutal treatment suffered by the Organisation Todt workers.



Although the beaches were mined, there was never a large garrison or a slave camp on our little island. From time to time at the beginning of the Occupation officers from Guernsey would come over to shoot rabbits and picnic at our beauty spots. In 1941 Marie-Claude became friendly with a handsome major. Suddenly, to the shock and shame of the Rozels, she deserted her infant daughter and went to Guernsey. No one knows what became of her afterwards.

Despite the troubled era in which we were born, Simon, Rupert, Dina and I had an exceptionally happy childhood. The few other children on the island were either much older, or part of the post-war 'bulge'. So the four of us grew up together, almost like brothers and sisters.

Before her marriage, my mother had trained to be a teacher. When, in 1939, the island's schoolmaster volunteered for the Army, Mother replaced him. Until we reached our eleventh birthdays when we had to continue our education in Guernsey, we never left the island except for occasional day trips to 'the Town' - the islanders' name for St Peter Port - for shopping and visits to the dentist.

Sometimes we overheard holidaymakers saying that although Carlou was a heavenly spot in summer-time, it must be a godforsaken place

in bad weather. We never found it so. In some ways we liked the winter months best, for then we had the island to ourselves, and the cliff paths and beaches were not spoiled by tourists' litter. It never ceased to exasperate us that some visitors could praise Carlou's peace and beauty, and yet thoughtlessly throw down their cigarette packets and sandwich wrappings to save themselves the trouble of carrying their rubbish to a waste basket.

In those days the ormers were still comparatively plentiful, and whenever there was an exceptionally low tide we would take our hooks and go ormering among the rocks which at normal tide levels would be under water. The little house where I was born was called Ormer Cottage because the inside of the porch was decorated with the beautiful iridescent shells which in French were called *Oreille de mer*, ear of the sea.

Soon after the war we left the cottage because my father's gratuity and the money he had saved enabled him to buy a much larger house. He wanted to give up fishing and run a guest house, and my mother, who had no wish to continue teaching once he had come home, was an enthusiastic partner in the scheme. The big house, built of grey granite, was called Le Colombier because it had dovescotes in the main gable.

When he was thirteen, Rupert, like his father before him, was sent to public school on the mainland. He did not want to go to England, and for the first weeks he was very unhappy and homesick. After he had settled down, I think he enjoyed his other life. Nevertheless he was always glad to come home, and to hear all the news and join in our plans for the holidays.

Although Simon was the eldest by a year, and Rupert the next in seniority, it was Dina who devised our most reckless exploits. Looking back, it seems incredible that she was ever a tomboy. Yet at twelve she could climb, fence and swim as well as fourteen-year-old Simon. Dina had run wild from babyhood. Her elderly, gentle grandparents were as incapable of quelling her renegade spirit as of schooling an unbroken colt. Whatever foolhardy impulse came into her head, she followed it. But it was the boys who were blamed when the impulses led to disaster.

I remember the day she decided to beat the tide-race at Raz Pointe.

Simon said, 'Don't be a fool. You know we've been told never to swim across.'

'You're scared!' she taunted.

He ignored her. Simon would never do anything which had been expressly prohibited, although I had seen him take other risks which

would have given the grown-ups heart failure, had they known of them.

‘Go on, Rupert – I dare you,’ Dina urged.

She knew none of her jibes would budge Simon, but Rupert had a different code of honour. To him, a dare was like a challenge to a duel. To refuse was unthinkable.

However, on this occasion even Rupert hesitated. At low water it was possible to wade, thigh-deep, across to the islet which had once been part of the promontory where we were standing. Even then it was not easy to keep one’s balance. Now, with spring tides surging and swirling among the rocks, the crossing looked dangerous enough to deter the most confident swimmer.

Before Rupert could make up his mind, Dina gave a snort of disdain, stripped off the cotton frock she was wearing over her bathing suit, and dived into the seething water. She was beneath the surface for so long that I shut my eyes, terrified that she had been caught by a powerful undertow and would never be seen again.

‘It’s okay. She’s nearly there now,’ Simon said reassuringly.

‘It’s easy. Come on, you three!’ shouted Dina, when she was standing safely on the islet.

So then, of course, Rupert and I had to follow her. I had been swimming since I was four and, normally, the deepest water held no terrors

for me. I *was* afraid of the tide-race, but more afraid of being called lily-livered by Dina, and thought a coward by Rupert.

When Simon said, 'You're too small, Andelys. You'll be bashed against the rocks,' I paid no attention to him.

Had I not been scared, I might have reached the islet. But fear made me muff my plunge. I hit the water with a smacking belly flop which knocked the breath out of me. Before I recovered, the current slammed me against a rock. Whereupon I lost my head and screamed to the others to help me.

My panic did not last long. Seconds later I was hauled ashore, gasping and choking from the water I had swallowed. By the time the other two reached us, Simon was staunching – with a rather grubby handkerchief – the blood which was pouring down my arm.

'Crikey! What happened?' Rupert asked anxiously.

'We'd better take her home. This is a pretty nasty gash,' said Simon.

'Oh, bother you, Anny. Why do you always make a mess of things?' Dina said irritably.

'She's younger and smaller than we are. You're the one to blame,' Simon retorted. 'I'll look after Andelys. You two go on to the camp.'

‘Perhaps we all ought to go back. There may be a row,’ said Rupert. ‘What shall you say happened?’

‘He’ll think of something. Come on, Rupert,’ said Dina impatiently. ‘We don’t want to waste the *whole* morning.’

Somewhat reluctantly he went with her, leaving Simon to give me a brisk rub down. I was shivering with shock.

‘I’m sorry, Simon,’ I mumbled, close to tears.

He grinned at my woebegone face, and gave me a kindly pat, as if I were a puppy. ‘It wasn’t your fault, fathead. Dina was stupid to dare you. She’ll break someone’s neck one of these days.’

Yet I think, in a way, he admired her headstrong courage. She was afraid of nothing.

Fortunately Mother was out when we reached my house, and it was my father who patched me up without asking too many questions about how the accident had happened. Then we followed the others to our camping place in the wood behind Rupert’s home, Le Manoir.

Nowadays baked beans and fried bread never taste half as good as they did years ago when we cooked them in a cast-off frying pan over a smoking twig fire. They were our favourite food, and we washed them down with ginger

beer from Mrs Tostevin's general store, followed by apples and sticky buns and liquorice bootlaces.

In winter, when it was wet, we played in the disused west wing at Le Manoir, or up in the warren of attics which had once housed a score of servants. Some of the rooms in the west wing were crammed with a fascinating jumble of discarded belongings. There were trunks full of uniforms and dresses going back to the seventeenth century. There were swords, and a collection of agates, and a brass loudhailer with an old ship's binnacle and compass. Some of the relics were rather gruesome, such as the mummified hand, and the replica of a Chinese woman's bound foot which we thought at the time was a real foot cut from a corpse. One of the things I liked best was a Regency dolls' house with hand-painted wallpapers and a miniature harp in the parlour. When bad weather kept us indoors, I never tired of poking in the boxes of tarnished trinkets or browsing through the albums of faded sepia photographs.

Once, Dina made up a tale about the west wing being haunted and then locked me in the room overlooking the rose garden. But although I was sometimes nervous of physical hazards, I was not afraid of ghosts or of the dark. Her ruse gave me an opportunity to try on the dresses without Dina jeering and saying what a freak I

looked in them. There was a pale blue pelisse with a padded hem and intertwined tabs on the shoulders, each tab finely bound and all the bodice seams piped. From the period of the French Revolution there was a round robe of very fine soft white muslin; and, from the reign of Victoria, a carriage dress of dove grey taffeta with pagoda sleeves and grey braid froggings and tassels. My favourite dress had a bodice of peach-coloured velvet, embroidered with silks and edged with a narrow green ribbon. For more than an hour I paraded and postured in front of the old, misty cheval glass, flourishing fans, pretending to be a great lady. Then Simon learned where I was and came to release me.

We saw little of Rupert's grandfather. The older islanders remembered the magnificent, vigorous man he had been in his prime. When we knew him he was paraplegic, confined to a wheelchair, the husk of the man they recalled. In summer he sometimes sat outside on the broad stone-flagged terrace which ran the full length of the south front. Occasionally, Bailey who had been his 'tiger' in the Navy, would take him on a tour of inspection by governess cart. But Sir Helier suffered not only pain but periods of black melancholy, and most of the time he stayed in his rooms in the south wing.

The estate was managed by his steward, Commander Fox. It was he who taught us to



fence. The house was run by Simon's mother, Mrs Herault. She was a quiet, pleasant person, not at all like Simon to look at. Some people said she was stuck up because she never lingered to chat in the island's few shops. I daresay she was too busy.

Two women from the village – the cluster of houses by the harbour – did the rough work. But it was Mrs Herault who cooked, and cleaned the silver, and dusted the valuable porcelain in the drawing-room. She nursed both boys through all the usual childhood illnesses, and kitted out Rupert for school and sent him boxes of gâche and home-made ginger cake. In spite of all she had to do, and although there were seldom any guests, the house was always full of flowers; lilies and roses in the drawing-room, beech leaves and lilac in the library, and everywhere Chinese dragon jars filled with heavenly-scented *pot-pourri*.

Of all our youthful escapades, the only one for which we were severely punished was the time Dina discovered the secret of the locked room.

One of the attics was kept shut up. When we asked Mrs Herault the reason for this, she said, rather evasively, that we had plenty of places in which to play without bothering about that one room. Naturally this fired our curiosity and we thought of a dozen hair-raising

explanations. Then, one afternoon when we were in the west wing, Dina disappeared for a time. The boys were playing draughts, and I was reading an uplifting Victorian book called *Teddy's Button* which I had unearthed from a tea chest.

Suddenly Dina came rushing down the corridor to announce, white-faced and hoarse, that she had succeeded in opening the door of the 'secret' room.

'What's the matter? What's in there?' Rupert demanded excitedly.

But she only rolled her eyes, and clapped her hands over her mouth as if she were going to be sick.

She had left the door slightly ajar, and even the boys looked apprehensive as they approached it, with me a safe distance behind them. Then Simon braced himself and kicked it wide open, and Dina gave a shriek of delighted laughter.

The room was quite empty. There was nothing in it but several large dusty cobwebs, and a stub of candle on the window ledge.

'What a sell! It's just like all the others.' In the moment of anti-climax, Rupert looked quite disappointed.

Dina was convulsed. 'If you could have seen your faces! What did you expect? A hideous corpse?'

Simon sniffed the musty atmosphere. 'There probably is one behind that skirting.' He pointed to a mouse hole in the corner. 'Phew! What a pong. Let's open the window.'

'But if there's nothing here, why is it always locked? And why was your mother so mysterious?' Rupert remarked perplexedly.

Simon shrugged. 'Search me. How did you get in, Dina?'

'I wiggled the lock with a hairgrip. It was easy.'

It was I who noticed the trap-door in the ceiling. 'What's that?' I asked.

'There must be another room above this one.' Dina's eyes brightened. 'Perhaps that's the secret.'

Rupert clambered on Simon's back and tugged at the two stout bolts which fastened the trap. Surprisingly, they pulled back easily. Then, grunting with strain, he pushed up the heavy door.

I drew in my breath as the hinges squeaked, expecting to see some dark and dreadful cavity. But the trap revealed nothing more exciting than a square of overcast sky.

'I say, this is rather fun,' Rupert reported, when he had pulled himself up through the opening and had a look round.

With Simon hoisting, and Rupert hauling, Dina and I joined him. Then Simon took a mighty spring and heaved himself up.

‘Look, there’s your house, Anny,’ said Rupert, as we surveyed the island from this new vantage point.

Dina was already exploring the roof. The central section was flat with a low parapet. The wings, having no attics, were roofed at a lower level. At the back of the house, above the stillrooms and sculleries, there was a hotch-pot of steeply-pitched gables.

‘What a super place. I wish we’d known about it before,’ she called, reappearing from behind a massive stack of chimneys.

Simon looked over the parapet. ‘Obviously they didn’t want us to know about it. Come on: we’d better go down.’

‘Don’t be such a fusspot,’ Dina said petulantly. ‘What harm are we doing? I like it up here.’

Rupert agreed. ‘After all, we haven’t been told *not* to come up,’ he pointed out reasonably.

Simon stood firm. ‘That’s not the point, and you know it. Come on, Andelys. I’ll help you to get down.’

‘Well, I’m not coming,’ said Dina defiantly. When he made a move to grab her, she darted out of his reach and jumped on the parapet.

I don't know how far it was to the ground below. It made me feel dizzy even to peep. But Dina pranced along the narrow stone ledge with all the aplomb of a high-wire artist.

'Come off there, you clot.' Even Rupert looked scared when she dared to stand on one leg.

'Come and get me!'

Laughing at our alarm, she strolled along to the far end of the parapet where the main roof ended and an iron ladder led down to the lower level of the south wing.

'Damn and blast her,' Simon swore, in a furious undertone. 'It would serve her right if we closed the trap and left her up here.'

'Oh, Simon, you wouldn't?' I begged.

'No, of course not, silly - but we've got to get her down. If anyone spots us, we'll be for it.'

When we reached the ladder, Dina was kneeling at the brink of the lower roof, peering at something below her.

'We can't rush her near the edge,' Simon murmured, climbing down the ladder. 'You go back to the trapdoor, Andelys, and count to a hundred. Then rush over here and pretend you've heard someone coming. If only we can get her away from the edge, we can grab her and make her go down.'

I did as he told me. Before I had counted to eighty, there was a shout and a muffled scream

from the other roof. Seconds later Simon and Dina came scrambling wildly up the ladder. From the looks on their faces I thought Rupert must be dead.

It was a fortnight before I learned how the accident had happened. For several days all I knew was that Rupert was in hospital in Guernsey with severe concussion, and the rest of us were forbidden to see each other. My father was so angry at what had happened that, even though I had not been directly involved, he imposed the harsh penalty of forbidding me to read in bed for a whole week.

‘The fact that you are the youngest is no excuse,’ he told me sternly. ‘You must have known the roof was out of bounds.’

Of Dina, I heard him say to Mother, ‘That wretched girl! What she needs is a damned good hiding. If the Rozels don’t take a firmer line with her, she’ll grow up a thorough vixen.’

It was a month before the storm blew over, and by then we were all back at school, Rupert with his broken wrist in a sling. What had happened was that, while I was counting, Dina had agreed to leave the roof. But first she had dared Rupert to climb down to the balcony of his grandfather’s sitting-room on the first floor and, if Sir Helier were dozing, to pinch a cigar. It had seemed a harmless feat. The balcony was not more than fifteen feet below the roof, and the

sinewy branches of an ancient wistaria appeared, from above, to offer plenty of secure holds.

But Rupert, although an experienced tree and cliff climber, had lost his balance when a rotten branch gave under his weight. If he had fallen against the balustrade of the balcony, he could have been killed, or maimed as badly as his grandfather.

That autumn, Dina upset Grand'mère Bonamy by announcing that she wanted her new guernsey to be scarlet instead of the customary navy blue.

It was usual on the island for the men and the children to have a new guernsey once a year. This was kept for Sundays and special occasions, and last year's best was taken in for everyday wear. Sometimes the children outgrew this arrangement, but my father and many other islanders were still wearing guernseys years old which had faded from navy to a soft grey-blue. Knitted in thick wool on fine needles, they were remarkably waterproof, and the sleeves were made short deliberately to keep the cuffs dry and out of the way when the wearer was fishing. Like most of the old knitters, Mrs Bonamy always worked our initials just above the welt. She was proud of her speed and skill with the knitting pins, and shocked by Dina's disregard for tradition, the more so since it was Canon Rozel

who had told her the long history of knitting in the Islands, and how Queen Elizabeth I had paid twenty shillings for Guernsey-knitted stockings, and Mary Stuart had worn white island hose at her execution.

It was my mother who calmed this storm in a teacup. She realised that Grand'mère's objection was to using inferior wool. At the same time she sympathised with Dina, whose olive complexion and dark eyes were not enhanced by navy blue. With her usual resourceful approach to any difficulty, Mother borrowed a book from the Guille-Allès Library at St Peter Port. Then she sent away for some madder with which she was able to dye the natural wool a bright and becoming turkey red.

That winter I began to be plump, and to have a bosom. I did not fine down again until I was eighteen, and I suffered agonies of embarrassment when Dina teased me in front of the boys.

She was skinny and flat-chested until she was nearly sixteen, and Simon too was a thin, long-legged, gangling boy. With their dark hair and tanned skin they were sufficiently alike to be taken for brother and sister. But Dina's eyes were dark brown, and Simon's slate grey.

Rupert was fair and blue-eyed. Perhaps he was a descendant of Rollo, the Viking leader who was the first Northman to take a part of France



by treaty rather than force, and whose son, William Longsword, conquered the Channel Islands in the tenth century. Selfishly, I was glad when Rupert went through a spotty phase, because then I was no longer the only one to suffer the shaming manifestations of adolescence. But I hated Dina for baiting him about his pimples. He would flush dark crimson and glower. Yet he never told her to shut up as Simon would have done in his place.

Rupert and I took no part in the periodic clashes between the other two. Their quarrels usually ended with Simon dragging Dina into the sea and ducking her, or with a wild chase through the woods from which they would return breathless but amicable once more.

One day, however, there was a fracas which really alarmed me.

It was at the end of the Christmas holidays, and a bitter east wind had forced us to spend the afternoon by the fire in the old day nursery. We were playing Monopoly, and the other three were smoking Turkish cigarettes which Dina had acquired from an unknown source.

The row started when Simon discovered that she had been cheating. As Banker, she had dealt out the paper money and given herself a double share of the starting capital.

‘What a fuss about nothing. It’s a silly, boring game anyway,’ she said, with a shrug,

when the boys told her off. And then she laughed and tipped up the table, and all the money and property cards scattered over the floor.

Simon lunged at her and they had the usual scuffle. He must have been rougher than he intended. Suddenly she yelped in real pain. He let her go at once, and she backed away from him, grimacing and nursing her wrist. 'You beast! You almost broke my arm,' she spat at him angrily.

'What rot. You aren't really hurt,' he retorted impatiently. 'Come on! Start picking up this mess. We aren't going to.'

Dina glared. 'Pick it up yourself.'

'Oh, stop rowing, you two. I'll do it,' Rupert put in.

Simon restrained him. 'No, leave it. Let her clear it up. She's the one who chucked it around,' he insisted sternly. 'And we won't play with her any more if she's going to cheat.'

This made Dina really mad. She could not bear to be bossed.

'I like that!' she flared up furiously. 'It's not your game. It belongs to Rupert. You're lucky we let you play with us, considering your mother is only a glorified servant.'

Heaven knows what prompted this gibe. I suppose it must have sprung from some remark she had overheard in the village. But it was a

hateful thing to say. Much worse than our usual schoolroom insults. And Dina said it so viciously.

For a second or two we stood there like four stuffed dummies. I think even Dina was shaken. Then Simon took one pace forward and gave her such a stinging slap on the cheek that she lost her balance and fell in a heap on the floor. A moment later he had slammed out of the room and left us.

‘Are you okay?’ Rupert hurried round the table to help her up.

She pushed him away. There was a vivid imprint on her cheek, and her eyes were bright with tears from the force of the blow.

‘You shouldn’t have said that. It was beastly,’ he told her gruffly. Yet I believed he was more shocked by Simon hitting her.

Dina scrambled to her feet. ‘I’m going home. Come on, Anny.’

Neither of us spoke as we walked down the long, winding drive. It was growing dusk and, as we passed the gatehouse, I saw the head gardener having tea in the lamplit kitchen.

Near my house, Dina said suddenly, ‘What an uncouth pig Simon is. Rupert would never hit a girl.’

I knew she was testing to find out whose side I was on. ‘He might – if she deserved it,’ I retorted. ‘I think it was foul of you, Dina. I

shouldn't be surprised if Simon never speaks to you again.'

'He'll get over it,' she said confidently. 'He's getting awfully strong. Much stronger than Rupert.'

It was too dark now to see her face clearly, but her voice sounded odd. I didn't know why, but it made me feel curiously uncomfortable.

'I'm going in,' I said brusquely. 'Goodnight.'

I was worried about what had happened all that evening. Mother was away for a week. She was on the mainland, looking after my English cousins while Aunt Ruth was in hospital for a minor operation. After supper, Father and I played gin rummy by the fire. But I couldn't concentrate on the cards.

I was afraid that Simon would not forgive Dina for speaking slightly of his mother, and that the rest of the holiday would be spoiled.

Next morning I made my bed and hurried downstairs to have my father's eggs and bacon ready by the time he finished shaving. Mrs Le Cocq, our help, cooked his lunch while Mother was away, but I was responsible for breakfast and supper and it was fun to look after him all by myself.

I was washing up when Dina called for me. She never had to do any housework, and was annoyed because I kept her waiting while I put

things away and rinsed out the tea towel as Mother always did.

At Le Manoir, we found Simon and Rupert in the stables, repairing a punctured bicycle tyre. Dina behaved as if nothing had happened, and so did Simon.

A few days later Rupert went back to school. During the following term we did not see much of Simon. He was approaching the awesome hurdle of O Levels. He had always worked hard at his lessons. Now he spent every moment swotting.

Gradually the winter days drew out and it was spring again. For the first week of the Easter holidays everything seemed just as it had always been. But it was not. As the days passed I was conscious that a change had come over us. I could not define it: we did much the same things as we had always done. But it was there, some intangible difference, and it made me uneasy and miserable.

Towards the end of the holidays there was one of those early heat waves which are so often followed by a wet, cold summer. For a fortnight the barometer stayed at *Dry*, the fields shimmered under a haze, and the water-splash in Church Lane was reduced to a muddy trickle. Dina's grandfather, old Canon Rozel, who was an

amateur meteorologist, had not recorded such high temperatures since the summer of 1923.

‘What a bore, having to go back to school on Monday,’ said Dina, yawning, one afternoon at the Mermaid’s Pool. ‘I’m so sick of the place, and all those ghastly old women.’

Looking back, I imagine that none of our mistresses was much over thirty, but to Dina and me they seemed as old as the hills.

‘Let’s go to the shop for some ices.’ Even in that heat she was restless.

‘Not me.’ Simon took a header into the pool.

It was twenty feet deep but looked less because of the aquamarine transparency of the water. Few visitors to the island discovered the pool because it was hidden from cliff-top view by an overhang, and the way down to it was only for the agile. Also it was submerged except for a few hours at low tide. Even in August we bathed there secure from intrusion, the sound of our voices mystifying any trippers who heard us from the path to the old lighthouse.

I watched Simon swim across the pool. During the winter he had grown and was now nearly six feet tall. Rupert, four inches shorter, still looked a schoolboy. But Simon had matured early. With his dark hair glistening in the sun, and his skin already deeply tanned, he looked even more foreign than Dina. Recently I had read

several novels by Lady Eleanor Smith, and I wondered romantically if Simon's father might have been a gypsy. There was some mystery about his father. Mrs Herault was not a widow, but she had brought up her son single-handed, and never referred to her husband.

'I wish I had a decent bathing suit. This old thing is too frumpish for words.' Dina was frowning down at her shrunken dark green wool suit.

'What's biting you today? You've been grouching all afternoon,' Rupert said drowsily. He was lying on his back on a towel, one forearm shading his eyes and his legs dangling over the pool's edge.

'I wasn't talking to you,' Dina said rudely.

'Well, I wish you'd shut up for five minutes.'

She pulled a grotesque face at him before jumping up and flouncing off across the rocks.

'Jolly good riddance,' he murmured.

Lately they were always bickering. Dina said Rupert was too juvenile for words, and he said she never stopped jabbering. Yet until that spring it had always been Simon who sparred with her.

About five, when the tide was rising, we dressed and dawdled back to Le Manoir where Mrs Herault gave us something to eat. At half past six it was time to go home for supper. Rupert had lost his clasp knife and gone to look

for it. I was alone in the yard, stroking Min, the oldest of the stable cats. As I went round the house by way of the kitchen garden, I heard voices from the direction of the potting sheds, and saw Simon and Dina there.

I don't know why, but instead of calling to Dina, I stopped and watched them for a moment. Simon, his hands in the pockets of his shorts, was watching a wood pigeon in flight. When Dina said something to him, he turned his head and glanced down at her.

I was about to call out that it was time for us to go when I was astonished to see her put her hands on his shoulders and reach on tiptoe to kiss him. Then she moved away and shook back her long dark hair, and I heard her laugh.

At that distance I couldn't see Simon's expression clearly. I assumed he must be as taken aback as I was. For what seemed ages he stood there, staring at her. She spoke to him again and turned, as if she meant to walk away. Simon made a kind of lunge and stopped her. I saw him put his arms right round her and kiss her; not on the cheek, as she had kissed him, but properly, the way grown-up people kissed each other.

I don't know what happened after that. I ran all the way home, and when I reached the house I locked the door of my room and flung myself on the bed and burst into tears. Because now I



knew I had been right: a great change had come upon us. I was the same and so, for the present, was Rupert. But Simon and Dina had outgrown us, left us behind. Nothing would ever be quite the same any more.

During the summer term, after a dramatic collapse in the middle of a history lesson, I was whisked into hospital to have my appendix removed. Afterwards I was taken home to convalesce, and a few days later Simon and Dina returned to Carlou for the half-term holiday. Rupert spent half-terms and *exeats* with his other grandparents in Somerset.

On Sunday morning Simon came to see me, bringing a big bunch of flowers from Le Manoir, and a book he thought I would enjoy. He spent all his pocket money on second-hand books. It was a brief visit, and he talked to Mother most of the time. I was glad she stayed with us. Although being in hospital had been a major event in my life, I had not forgotten what I had seen in the kitchen garden a few weeks ago, and it weighed on me like a guilty secret. I no longer felt comfortable with Simon.

After lunch, Dina came to see me. 'Granny sent these chocs. Are you allowed to eat them? If not, I will,' she said, lolling on the end of the bed. She was wearing a new dress, the colour of sea holly. She told me the latest school gossip, and I

showed her my scar. After half an hour, having eaten all the coffee creams and nougats, she bounced off the bed and said she couldn't stay any longer. She looked flushed and excited, and I knew she was going to see Simon.

That evening Miss Wallace arrived. She came every year for the second fortnight in June, and for my ninth birthday she brought me a Victorian biscuit tin in the shape of a set of Sir Walter Scott's Waverley novels. When I was ten, her present was a little brass padlock which would open only when the letters on six revolving rings were arranged to form the word *Calais*. When I was twelve, and beginning to enjoy sewing, she brought me a Regency workbox veneered with many different woods and lined with cornflower blue paper. The lid of the box had a crack in it and the lining was spotted and torn in places, causing Dina, when she saw it, to say 'I don't call *that* much of a present.'

Dina had no feeling for old things, and certainly not for anything damaged. But to me the cracked lid was unimportant. The box with its long unknown history pleased me far more than a new one.

Miss Wallace came by such things because she kept an antique shop. But it was not for her presents that I liked her. She was a fellow

bookworm who shared my taste for romantic poetry.

She was one of the handful of regular visitors who had seen the interior of Le Manoir. If anyone particularly interesting – a leading surgeon or a barrister – came to Carlou on holiday, Commander Fox would hear of it and, if Sir Helier was not having one of his bad spells, an invitation to dinner would be forthcoming. When I asked Mother why Miss Wallace merited this accolade, she said, ‘Apparently when Sir Helier was a young man he nearly became engaged to her elder sister. Miss Wallace is in reduced circumstances now, but she still belongs to that milieu.’

When Rupert came home in July, there began another long heat-wave. The island abounded with butterflies, not only the usual graylings and gatekeepers, but clouded yellows and painted ladies, red admirals and dark green fritillaries. One day Rupert reported seeing two rare peacock butterflies.

He seemed not to notice that whereas before we had been a foursome, now we were often twosomes.

‘I bet I don’t get through my exams,’ he said gloomily when, in August, we heard that Simon had sailed through all his O Levels with flying colours.

'It's only a matter of swotting for a year,' Simon told him.

'It's easy for you. You're brainy,' Rupert retorted. He was not a studious boy. Games were his forte, and he was interested in shells and birds and insects.

Unlike Rupert with his passion for rugger and cricket, Simon had no interest in organised sports. The outcome of the Test Matches was a matter of indifference to him. Twickenham, a magic name to Rupert, was to Simon merely a place in Middlesex. He liked sailing and fishing and rock-climbing, but above all he liked to read, and when he had his nose in a book even Dina could not distract him.

One day, when the four of us were on the beach together, and Rupert was swimming and she thought I wasn't looking, Dina began to stroke Simon's arm with her fingertips. For a time he seemed not to notice, and then, without looking up from the book he was reading, he grasped her hand and put it firmly away from him. Dina looked furious; and she was even angrier when she saw that I had seen the rebuff.

But he did not always repulse her. The following week I wandered into the disused *pressoir* which housed the great oak press and the round granite cider trough. I was hunting for hens' eggs for Mrs Herault, and wearing sandals in which my feet made no sound on the beaten

earth floor. Dina and Simon didn't see me because they both had their eyes closed. After staring at them for a moment, I slipped out as softly as I had entered. I was not as shocked as I had been the other time, but I still felt it was wrong for them to kiss, and that there would be terrible trouble if the grown-ups found out.

One evening, not long after he had received his examination results, Simon came to see Mother. She was kneading the dough for the croissants for the next day's breakfast. Father and I had washed up, and he was sitting in the rocker by the stove, reading the paper. I had finished laying the four tables in the dining-room, and was busy with my patchwork. For my thirteenth birthday, Miss Wallace had given me a Victorian gilt-metal needle-case in the form of a butterfly, and a book about patchwork. After searching every rag bag on the island for suitable snippets, I had embarked on a patchwork quilt for my bed.

'I'm sorry to bother you, Mrs Brelade. I know how busy you are in August. But I need some advice rather urgently, and I can't think of anyone else who will give me an unbiased opinion,' he said.

'I'm never too busy for you, Simon. Let me put this to rise, and then I've finished. We'll take a turn round the garden, shall we?'

‘Yes, if you like, but it isn’t anything confidential, and I expect you’re like my mother – glad to sit down at the end of the day.’

She smiled. ‘It is a long day in the season, but it’s work I enjoy, and how many women see a view like that from their kitchens?’ – with a nod towards the open window which framed a calm summer seascape with the outlines of Guernsey and Sark beginning to fade into the dusk.

When she had covered the basin and tidied the table, Mother sat down and gave him her full attention. ‘Now, what is your problem, Simon?’

‘Now that I’ve got through O Levels, everyone is expecting me to stay in the Sixth for two years, and then go on to university,’ he began. ‘I don’t want to disappoint them, but I want to leave school immediately. You see, I want to become a journalist, and the editor of the *Evening Press* is willing to give me a start as a junior reporter.’

My father put down his paper. ‘A journalist, eh? How long have you had this in mind?’

‘For a long time; for more than a year, sir. My mother is hoping that I’ll go in for banking or law, or something of that sort. But I’m not cut out for a desk job. I don’t want that kind of life.’

‘What sort of life do you want, Simon?’ asked Mother.

‘The thing I want most is to travel, and there isn’t any job where I’ll have a better

opportunity to see the world. But that isn't my only consideration,' he told her earnestly. 'In a few years' time, television will be the most important means of communication, and a trained newspaperman will be in a good position to land a plum job in television.'

'Television!' my father snorted. 'I doubt if television will ever supersede the newspapers. However, that's all in the future. For the present, if you have the chance to get yourself a university degree, you'd be a fool not to take it. Don't you agree, Mary?'

My mother pondered for some moments. 'No, I don't think I do agree, Remy,' she said in her mild way. 'I believe the greatest advantage to a young person is to *know* what they want to do with their life. At Simon's age, very few are certain of their métier and indeed many are still not sure at the end of their time at university. In a general sense, higher education is always valuable. But it isn't essential to every career. Where journalism is concerned, I imagine that practical experience is more important than a degree. Naturally you've discussed this with your headmaster, Simon?'

'Yes, and he doesn't approve,' Simon admitted. 'But he always discourages anyone who wants to branch off from one of the "safe" jobs like teaching and the Civil Service.'

‘There’s a lot to be said for a safe job with a pension at the end of it,’ my father remarked.

I did not know it at the time, but he was often worried about our own security. For generations, the Brelades had lived by fishing. Had he married an island girl, Father might have been content to continue the tradition. But he had married Mother, who came from an English middle-class background, and although she would not have minded remaining at Ormer Cottage, he wanted to make money for her. To this end, he had ambitious plans for enlarging and modernising Le Colombier, and that year the first of a succession of bank overdrafts was weighing on his mind.

Because physically my father was a brave man, while Mother was nervous of heights and rough seas and spiders, it puzzled me that he should counsel caution and she should encourage Simon to follow his bent. When I was older, I realised that her attitude was not really surprising. Only a girl of a bold and confident character would have leapt the social, financial and educational gulf which separated my parents when first they met. Mother’s family, she told me later, had tried to dissuade her from the marriage, but she had been convinced that my father had moral qualities which were far more important than his lack of prospects or polish. Time had proved her right, and therefore she



believed that, in matters of great moment, it was best to rely on one's instinct rather than one's intellect.

When Simon had gone home, his belief in himself strengthened by Mother's sympathetic reaction, my father said doubtfully, 'I hope you were right to encourage him, Mary. I can't help feeling that Mrs Herault will be very upset when he tells her what he has in mind.'

'It's his life, my dear – not hers. To be happy and useful is all we should wish for our children. We shouldn't impose our ambitions on them. They must follow their own stars.'

Sir Helier and Commander Fox opposed Simon's plans, but Mrs Herault, whatever her inward misgivings, expressed the same view as my mother – that her son must choose his own future.

Thus when Dina and I returned to school in September, Simon was already settled in lodgings in St Peter Port, and reporting such things as funerals, the Petty Debts Court and school sports. He stayed on the *Press* for two years, until it was time for his National Service.

A few weeks before he left Guernsey, Dina persuaded her grandparents to send her to a finishing school in Paris.

'Won't it cost a lot of money?' I asked when she rushed round to tell me this news.

‘Yes, but Granny is going to sell her silver tea service and that hideous commode which Miss Wallace told her was valuable,’ she explained carelessly. She flung herself on my bed. ‘A whole year in Paris! – Think of it! Aren’t you green with envy? Don’t you wish you were me?’

When at lunch time, I told my parents, they were furious.

‘It is too bad of her,’ said Mother angrily. ‘She must know how hard up they are. To induce them to sell their few treasures . . . ’

Father was equally indignant, and thought Mother ought to try to dissuade the Rozels from indulging Dina’s extravagant scheme.

‘No, it would be a waste of breath, Remy. I would only offend the poor old things. They’re devoted to Dina. They see their beloved Peter in her, and turn a blind eye to the fact that she is much more like her mother.’

‘Well, it’s an ill wind which blows no one any good. At least it will break up this business between her and Simon. Girls like that lead a boy on – ’ Catching my eye, Father did not finish this remark but asked for another helping of pudding.

Later, when he was not present, I asked Mother what he had meant about Dina leading Simon on.

‘They’re far too young to be serious about each other, Andelys. When Simon goes into the

Army, I expect he will meet lots of girls, just as Dina will meet other boys. They may think they're in love, but it's only calf love. In a year or two, they'll wonder what they saw in each other. It's a good thing they're both leaving home for a time. Although I must say I think it's madness to let Dina loose in Paris, of all places. She is such an irresponsible creature. Heaven knows what she may get up to there.'

Dina left Carlou at the beginning of September. Her grandfather escorted her to Paris. Although I received only a couple of coloured postcards, she wrote to the Rozels every week. Mrs Rozel showed me the letters. Surprisingly, they were not the scrappy notes I had expected. Sometimes Dina covered two or three pages of airmail paper with descriptions of visits to the Louvre and Notre Dame, and amusing accounts of the Cordon Bleu cookery classes, some of which were conducted by a temperamental chef from a famous Paris restaurant.

With Dina in Paris, Simon at an army camp in Yorkshire, and Rupert at school, I felt sadly bereft for a while. Dina came home for Christmas, but only for a few days. Then she returned to France to stay at the home of a friend she had made at the finishing school.

After Christmas, my parents arranged an unexpected treat. Leaving Father to fend for himself for a few days, my mother took Rupert and me to London.

I was almost quivering with excitement when we arrived at Waterloo Station and took a taxi to our hotel near the British Museum. After lunch, Rupert looked round the museum while mother took me shopping in Regent Street. In the evening we went to the theatre.

On the second day we spent the morning at the Zoo in Regent's Park, and the afternoon at the Tower and Madame Tussaud's. That night Mother was dining with an old school friend who lived at Chiswick. Greatly to our delight, Rupert and I were allowed to go out on our own.

'I don't mind where you go as long as you're back here by eleven o'clock. I may not be back until after midnight,' she told us, before she set out.

'Don't worry, Mrs Brelade. We won't get lost,' Rupert promised her.

'No, I shan't worry. I know Andelys will be all right with you, Rupert.'

'You know, I never realised what a smasher your mother is,' Rupert said reflectively, after she had gone.

'She did look nice, didn't she?' I, too, had been surprised by Mother's elegance in her black dinner dress and fur coat. At home she always

wore tweed skirts and twin sets with thirty-denier nylons and sensible shoes.

We decided to walk along Oxford Street to a cinema near Marble Arch. Mother had left early in order to have a gossip with her friend before the dinner party. The rush hour crowds were pouring into the Underground at Oxford Circus and Bond Street, and the traffic was chaotic with cars and buses stopping and starting, and taxis weaving out of side streets. I found the confusion and noise exciting. When I wanted to cross the road to look in the brightly lit showcases of a huge shoe shop, Rupert took my hand and scurried me through the gaps in the torrent of traffic. He kept hold of my hand all the rest of the way to the cinema. When we reached it, he bought a box of chocolates for me and cigarettes for himself.

The film was a French one, with English subtitles. There were one or two love scenes which made my cheeks go hot. I think Rupert was embarrassed too, because he shuffled his feet and fidgeted.

It was cold coming out of the warm, smoky darkness into the draughty street. Rupert hailed a taxi and asked the driver to take us to Chez Victoire, a restaurant in Soho recommended to him by a boy at school.

It was in a narrow street, and it was not impressive from outside; just a neon sign above

a glass door with a menu in a frame beside it, and a curtained window with some dim, rosy lights showing through.

But when Rupert pushed open the door, I stepped on to a thick, soft carpet and saw a long room with a bar on one side, and tables and red velvet banquettes along the other wall.

‘Good evening, m’sieur . . . mademoiselle. You have a reservation?’ A little dark man in a tail coat, with a foreign accent, came forward, bowing and smiling.

‘I’m afraid not. Are you full up?’ Rupert looked rather dismayed. I think, like me, he had not expected such an unimpressive façade to conceal such a sumptuous interior.

The tables were covered with pink damask cloths, and the light from the silk-shaded lamps made the glasses sparkle and the silver gleam.

‘There will be a table shortly, m’sieu. If you would care to have an aperitif . . . ?’ The head waiter snapped his fingers, and another man helped me out of my tweed coat and took charge of Rupert’s Burberry.

‘What would you like to drink, Anny?’ asked Rupert, when we perched on two stools at the bar.

I looked at the array of bottles. Obviously it was not the sort of place where one could ask for lemonade.

‘Mm . . . sherry, please,’ I said uncertainly.

‘You prefer dry or sweet, mademoiselle?’ The barman was another foreigner. With his black hair and thin olive face, he reminded me a little of Simon.

I asked for sweet sherry, and Rupert had a dry Martini. There were little glass dishes filled with nuts and green and black olives all along the bar, and red books of matches with *Chez Victoire* printed in gold.

By that time I wanted to spend a penny. After sipping the sherry I glanced round the restaurant and luckily, the first thing I noticed was a door discreetly marked Powder Room. Otherwise I should never have had the courage to ask where the loo was.

When I came back, the barman was serving some other people.

‘It looks fearfully expensive. Can you afford it, Rupert?’ I whispered.

‘Yes, Grandfather gave me a tip. I’ve got nearly ten pounds.’

By the time we had finished our drinks, there was a table free. Rupert helped me down from my stool, and a waiter pulled the table out so that I could sit down on the banquette. Another waiter presented us with enormous menu cards. Everything seemed to cost at least twenty-five shillings. Even ice cream and fruit was twelve and sixpence.

Actually it was the head waiter who chose our meal for us. While we were studying the menus, he came and bowed to Rupert and said, 'If I may suggest . . . '

However, Rupert chose the wine unaided. He knew a good deal about wines because there were cellars full of them at Le Manoir, and Sir Helier had taught him about *marques* and vintages.

After that we relaxed and enjoyed ourselves. We did not even have to spread our napkins. A very young waiter came and shook them out for us. It was like being royalty, I thought.

We finished the meal about ten, and the wine waiter came to ask if we wanted liqueurs.

'No, just coffee, thanks,' said Rupert. 'Are you tired, Anny? Or shall we have another stroll around?'

In spite of the rich French food and two glasses of wine, I had never felt more wide awake. I wanted to stay up all night.

After Rupert had worked out the tip and put more than half his ten pounds on the silver salver with the bill, he signalled that we were ready to leave. They brought us our coats and bowed us out as if we were millionaires. What I liked about them all at Chez Victoire was that although they must have guessed our ages and that we were not accustomed to dining at



fashionable restaurants, they treated us exactly like proper grown-up patrons.

After the soft pink glow in the restaurant, the street seemed very dark and rather eerie. I stumbled on the edge of the pavement, and Rupert put an arm round my shoulders.

‘I say, you’re not tiddly, are you?’

‘Of course not. Have you any idea where we are?’

‘Not a clue,’ he admitted cheerfully.

His arm was still round my shoulders when we found ourselves back in Regent Street. We returned to the hotel at precisely three minutes to eleven.

Rupert’s room was on a different floor from the one I was sharing with Mother. He escorted me to our bedroom door.

‘This time tomorrow we’ll be back home,’ he said regretfully. ‘I wish we could stay a week.’

‘So do I. But it has been fun – especially tonight.’ I remembered the bill he had paid, and my own untouched pin money. ‘I’ve got two pounds towards the meal we had.’

‘Don’t be silly,’ he said, rather gruffly. ‘Girls don’t pay when someone takes them out.’

‘But I’m not a girl,’ I protested. ‘I mean . . . oh, you know what I mean.’

‘No, I don’t.’ His voice was even gruffer. Then he kissed me.

It wasn't at all as I had imagined it. In my daydreams, there was always a background of moonlight and music. I would be wearing a ball gown, and my imaginary lover would murmur how beautiful I was, and that he couldn't live without me.

Rupert didn't say anything. He just grabbed me, and kissed me, and before I had grasped what had happened, he had shot up the stairs to his own room.

At the end of the following term, my form mistress gave me a lecture on the way my work had fallen off, and how I should have to pull myself together if I hoped to do well in July.

Listening to her, I thought how terrible it must be to be middle-aged and never have been in love.

'Yes, Miss Leeds . . . no, Miss Leeds,' I said meekly. But my mind was not on reports, or exams, or my future. I could think of nothing but that in a few days Rupert would be home again.

April was always heavenly at Carlou, but that year, when I was sixteen, the island was Arcady. For the first three days of the holiday I wandered about the woods and gardens of Le Manoir.

*For winter's rains and ruins are over,  
And all the season of snows and sins,*

*The days dividing lover and lover,  
The light that loses, the night that  
wins.*

*And in green underwood and cover  
Blossom by blossom the spring begins.*

I had been reading Swinburne the afternoon Foster, the gardener, caught me crying in the summer-house.

‘Whatever’s the matter, miss?’

Feeling a fool, I mumbled something about a headache. How could I explain my tears when I did not understand them myself?

Next morning, tidying my bedroom, I saw Rupert cycling down the lane. He did not see me at the window and, as I watched him prop his bicycle against the hedge and stroll up the path to the kitchen door, my mouth was dry with excitement.

‘Hello, Anny. Coming for a bathe?’ he asked casually, when I went downstairs.

Happiness is said to be a condition which one recognises only in retrospect. But all through that Easter holiday I was consciously, joyously happy. Now I was glad that Simon and Dina were away. They would have spoiled the delight of having Rupert to myself, and waiting, with blissful anticipation, for him to kiss me again.

Dina was spending the first fortnight of the holiday with her French friend. It appeared that

the girl had no mother, and her father was often away on business. Proudly, Mrs Rozel had showed Mother the letter in which he begged her to allow her granddaughter to stay with his little Sophie again. Sophie had been a shy, lonely girl until Dina befriended her. Now, gradually, she was coming out of her shell.

‘Let us hope that, under Dina’s influence, little Sophie doesn’t go from one extreme to the other,’ I heard Mother say to my father, after her call on the old lady.

The day before Dina was expected home, Canon Rozel was found dead in the churchyard. Like Mother, Mrs Rozel was not an islander. After the funeral she decided to return to England to live with her unmarried sister who had a small house at Lyme Regis. When Simon came home on embarkation leave, another clergyman and his wife were installed in Church House, and Dina and her grandmother had left Carlou.

Simon spent the rest of his National Service in Malaya where he was at first a lance-corporal and then a sergeant in the Intelligence Corps. He wrote every week to his mother, and occasionally to Rupert and to me.

That summer Rupert spent part of the holidays with a friend whose father had an aeroplane. He came home determined to learn to fly, an enthusiasm which led him to spend his National Service in the Fleet Air Arm. Had his

father been alive, he would have been expected to make the Service his career until in late middle-age he inherited the mantle of privilege and responsibility worn by successive Fontaines since the Patent to the island had been granted to Richard Fontaine by Queen Elizabeth I. However, as his father was dead, and it was evident that his grandfather was unlikely to reach a great age, he had grown up knowing that Carlou would be his many years earlier than usual. Had there been no conscription at that time, he might have become the first Fontaine to break the family's long tradition of Naval service, and it was only his desire to qualify as a pilot which made him accept his call-up philosophically. Basically he was like me and had no desire to experiment with other ways of life outside the island.

The problem of my future was solved, at least for the time being, when my mother had to have a hysterectomy. Eventually her health was improved by the operation, but for about a year afterwards she was often tired and depressed, partly because she had set her heart on my leaving home and making a career for myself, and now she could not deny that she needed my help about the house.

'I do hate to see you wasting your youth like this,' she said sadly, one day when she came

downstairs after her afternoon rest to find me busy at the ironing board.

‘Mother, I’m *happy*. I don’t want to be a career girl. There’s nothing I’d enjoy less than working in a town on the mainland and living in a dreary bed-sitter.’

‘Every woman should have a career to fall back on in case she is left a widow or her marriage fails,’ said Mother doggedly. ‘Besides, how are you to choose your husband wisely when you meet so few young men?’

There was a letter from Rupert in the pocket of my apron. For a moment I was tempted to confide in her; to say that my choice was made already. Then I changed my mind and said nothing. I was afraid she would think I was too young to know my own mind, and I knew I was not. One of the many reasons why I had wanted to stay at home after leaving school was that housework left the mind free to daydream. As a nurse or secretary, I should have been forced to concentrate on my job. But while I made the beds, polished the furniture and peeled the vegetables, I could picture the blissful future when I would no longer be Andelys Brelade but Andelys Fontaine.

The preparations for Rupert’s twenty-first birthday ball began weeks beforehand. Bedrooms shut up for years were stripped of

their musty holland shrouds, and the windows flung open to let in the warm summer breezes. Pile upon pile of sheets and pillowcases – beautiful, hand-stitched Irish linens, some of them never used before – were brought down from the linen room to be laundered. Not only would Le Manoir be full of guests, but so would the island hotels and other suitable lodgings. Twelve months earlier Commander Fox had called on my parents to arrange for all our rooms to be reserved, at Sir Helier's expense, for the week of the ball. This was in case squally weather – unlikely, but not unknown in June – should make it necessary for the guests to cross to Carlou a day or two early, or should delay their departure.

By the twenty-fifth, preparations had reached fever pitch. In the drawing-room, cleared of much of its furniture and with its carpets rolled and put away, three florists from London were weaving festoons of roses, lilac and syringa.

In the dining-room the advance guard from the caterers were setting up the buffet tables and unpacking crates of champagne glasses. In the hall, undisturbed by the flurry around him, a little old man had lowered the great chandelier and was painstakingly washing the hundreds of lead crystal prisms, and testing the soft brass pins which held each sparkling drop in place.

‘This’ll be a rare sight when it’s up, miss,’ he said, when I took him some tea. ‘They soon get dirty, but when they’ve been newly cleaned, it’s like seeing a fountain through a rainbow.’

On the morning of the ball, I woke up at half past six. Hopping out of bed, I pushed up the window and leaned out. The sky was a pale hazy blue, not a cloud to be seen. It was going to be a perfect day.

Before I went to the bathroom, I opened the wardrobe to look at my dress. I had made it myself from nine yards of lustrous white poulte. All over the skirt I had sewn little flat velvet bows, each with a pearl stitched in the centre. One of the bows hid a bloodstain from a pricked finger, and the zip fastener was not put in as perfectly as I should have liked. Otherwise it was the dress of my dreams, and I could hardly wait for Rupert to see me in it.

If I live to be a hundred years old, I shall never forget the night of the ball at Le Manoir. It was still light when we arrived, and on the calm midsummer sea a flotilla of large and small boats was converging on the harbour, bringing people from Guernsey and Sark. The entire island was *en fête*, for although all the islanders would not be present at the ball, all were included in the night’s celebrations. My father said that, for his part, he would sooner be among those who would toast Rupert’s health in beer than among



the champagne drinkers, few of whom would be known to him.

‘Grand’mère Bonamy says this is the last ball they’ll have here. According to her, there are bad times ahead for the Fontaines,’ he remarked, as we walked up the drive.

‘What did she mean? – That Rupert won’t have a son?’ I asked.

‘You shouldn’t repeat Grand’mère’s nonsense, Remy,’ Mother put in disapprovingly. She did not believe the old woman’s claim to second sight. ‘I expect Rupert will have a large family, as no doubt his parents would have done, but for the war. The Fontaines were always prolific. But whether, by the time Rupert’s eldest son comes of age, we shall still be exempt from mainland taxes – that remains to be seen.’

Rupert and his grandfather were receiving their guests in the hall. Rupert was wearing a new dinner jacket instead of the one which had belonged to his father and which was now rather tight on him. He stood with his left hand resting on the back of Sir Helier’s wheelchair, and there was something curiously moving in the sight of the big, strong young man towering above the crippled old man. As I waited my turn to shake hands, I was trembling inside.

‘You look lovely, Anny,’ said Rupert.

It was not an extravagant compliment. Knowing him, I had not expected anything

flowery. But his tone and the look in his eyes said much more than his words.

In the sparkling, garlanded drawing-room, the band were already playing music from *My Fair Lady*. Someone touched my arm and, turning, I found Simon smiling down at me. It was some months since we had last seen him as he was working abroad for Reuters, the news agency, and his mother had thought he would not be able to come. However, the day before he had cabled her to expect him, and now here he was with an Arab-dark Middle East tan which made the rest of us seem pale by comparison.

He said good evening to my parents, and to Miss Wallace who was with us, and then he asked me to dance. I should have liked Rupert to be my first partner, but I knew that even when he had finished receiving, he had duty dances to perform before he could relax and enjoy himself. Meanwhile Simon was a more comfortable partner than Rupert's school friends of whom I was secretly nervous.

Miss Wallace had given me a painted silk fan which hung from my wrist by a green silk ribbon. The sticks were of ivory, and the edges of the silk were decorated with silver spangles, slightly tarnished.

To my surprise, Simon also had a present for me. He took it out of his pocket after our first dance together. It was a *carnet de bal* with

wafer-thin ivory leaves between mother-of-pearl covers with a tiny silver clasp. When I spread out the leaves I saw that on the first one he had pencilled – *To Andelys, with love from Simon.* June 1959.

‘How pretty. Where did you find it?’

‘In a junk shop in Bristol.’

‘But it’s ages since you left the *Western Daily Press*. Or have you been back there recently?’

‘No, I found it when I was working there. I thought it would do for *your* twenty-first birthday, but tonight seems an equally appropriate time to give it to you.’

‘Thank you, Simon. I love it. But I haven’t an evening bag, so I’ll have to ask Mother to keep it for me.’

‘No need. It can go back in my pocket for the time being. Shall we dance again?’

‘What was your present to Rupert?’ I asked, as he put his arm round me.

‘A book about birds. And yours?’

‘I gave him a box for cuff-links. Not very exciting, but the things I’d have liked to give him were all too expensive. I saw a darling silver owl in the window of – ‘ I stopped short, becoming aware that Simon was not listening to me but was gazing at something outside.

‘What are you staring at?’

‘Someone’s arriving by air.’ He danced me to the edge of the floor and out through the tall arched glass doors which gave on to the terrace.

For some moments I was bewildered. There was no landing field on Carlou, nor was there an aircraft in sight. Then my ears caught a deep throbbing drone, and soon afterwards the helicopter appeared above the treetops of the West Wood. It circled the house three times before it landed, and by then the terrace was crowded with spectators, including Rupert.

‘I’ve no idea who it can be. No one said they were coming by chopper,’ we heard him reply to a question.

The helicopter came down in the centre of the lawn. It was carrying only one passenger who was helped from the cockpit by the pilot. Wrapped in a long hooded cloak, this person ducked under the still-whirling blades of the propeller, straightened, and walked towards the house.

‘It’s a woman!’ someone exclaimed, and I shared their surprise.

As she came near the foot of the steps, Rupert went down to meet her. From where we were standing, in the angle of the stone balustrade, Simon and I could see his face, and clearly he had no idea who she was.

But the woman knew him. She said in a calm, clear voice, ‘Good evening, Rupert. You

didn't invite me, but I hope I'm welcome at your birthday.'

She put back the hood. Her hair was like thick blackberry silk. Then she undid the clasp of the cloak and shrugged it from her shoulders so that it would have fallen to the grass had the pilot, still standing behind her, not caught it and draped it across his arm. Like a queen and her courtier, I thought, mesmerised.

Her dress was unlike any there. The fashion that year was for fondant colours, crisp fabrics and bare arms and shoulders. But this woman was wearing soft chiffon the colour of curry speckled with saffron and indigo. Her sleeves were long and her wrists were encircled by bracelets of bright Eastern gold. A collar of gold, like a torque, rested on the high neckline, and in her ears were gold hoops fringed with bright drops of coral. Her face and her hands were as bronzed as those of an Indian, and her mouth was its natural colour, painted with something which made it glisten. Compared with the women around her, she was as exotic and eye-catching as a beautiful crested hoopoe in an aviary full of doves and budgerigars.

Beside me, Simon gave a sound like a stifled laugh. Then the woman took off her dark glasses, and at last I recognised her.

It was Claudine Rozel. It was Dina.

‘Dina!’ Rupert ejaculated.

She smiled and held out her hands, and he took them in his.

‘Admit it: you’d forgotten me,’ she accused him laughingly. ‘But I’ve never forgotten you, and when I read about your birthday in the paper in London the other day, I decided to surprise you. Congratulations and all my good wishes, Rupert dear.’ She swayed like a flower in the wind and kissed him on both cheeks.

‘Who is she?’

‘I say, what a stunner!’

‘What a very odd dress. Is she Eurasian?’

The murmurs of curiosity, admiration, and the hostility which some women feel at the sight of someone more attractive than themselves prevented me from hearing Dina’s next words.

Rupert was still looking stupefied. Before he had recovered from his astonishment, she tucked her hand through his arm and they turned and went into the house, the onlookers making way as for visiting royalty.

‘As a grand entrance, that was in a class of its own,’ Simon murmured in my ear.

He and I were among the last couples to re-enter the drawing-room, and as we did so, I said, ‘What about the pilot? She seems to have forgotten him. Oughtn’t we to – ‘

But even as I spoke we heard the sound of the helicopter preparing to take off. We watched

it soar into the sky. At the foot of the steps stood a suitcase with the flame-bright cloak folded over it.

‘It seems our glamorous gatecrasher is planning to stay for a while,’ said Simon, going to fetch it.

We put the suitcase in the gun-room. ‘Mm . . . Vuitton,’ Simon said thoughtfully.

‘Vuitton?’ I echoed. ‘What’s that?’

‘The luggage of the very rich. Dina must be riding high.’

I examined the cloak. It was lined with matching crêpe-de-chine and there was a label – *Christian Dior*. I showed it to Simon. ‘Perhaps she’s married a nabob.’

‘Perhaps.’

We had supper together, sitting half way up the staircase. With every delicious mouthful of poached salmon I expected to see the others coming in search of us. But they did not appear, and there was none of my own impatience in Simon’s manners. He seemed content to enjoy his supper and listen to the conversation of the drawling young men and debby girls on the stairs above and below us who, presumably, were Rupert’s English friends.

‘Aren’t you dying to meet her?’ I asked him when he took my empty plate from me.

‘Who? Dina?’ He shrugged. ‘I shall be interested, naturally. But dying – no. I’m happy with my present partner.’

His flattery did not please me. I disapproved of insincerity, even when it was intended to be gallant.

‘Come and choose your pudding,’ said Simon, and he led the way down the stairs, careful not to tread on the billows of paper taffeta and organza which had seemed so romantically pretty before Dina’s arrival.

When next I saw her, she was dancing with Commander Fox. She caught sight of me, and said something which made him glance over his shoulder and steer her towards me.

‘Anny! How are you?’ She seized me by the shoulders and kissed me.

No wonder Rupert had looked bemused when she had kissed him. She smelt delicious, and when she stepped back I realised that, although the high-necked ochre chiffon looked very seemly from a distance, there was scarcely a stitch underneath it. Those of us with bare arms and backs were encased in strapless bras or built-in boning, and at that time women still wore stockings, and suspenders with knobs and tight girdles. But Dina, as I found out later, had nothing under her dress but a pair of gossamer tights bought from a theatrical costumier, and a flimsy French bra made of three narrow tan-



coloured ribbons and two small triangles of net. Confronted with her slender shape, I was sinkingly conscious of the plumpness which my parents dismissed as puppy fat but which at that moment made me feel like an overstuffed white poult cushion.

My spirits revived a little when Rupert asked me to dance, but later they sank even lower, for he did not ask me again, yet danced repeatedly with Dina.

Instead of staying to the end, I left the ball with my parents soon after one, and as we walked home I felt the first pangs of the bewilderment and misery which, in the days that followed, became worse and worse.

For a time I refused to face the truth, and made excuses for Rupert's sudden neglect of me. Even when I had to admit to myself that he was infatuated with Dina, I could not believe it would last. It was Dina herself who finally made me understand that the spell she had cast upon Rupert was not an involuntary effect from which he would quickly recover when she went away.

She was staying at Le Manoir. On the night of the ball she had not needed a room because, with the exception of myself and Simon, none of the young people had gone to bed. They had danced until four in the morning and, at sunrise at quarter to five, were breakfasting down on the beach. By the following night, many of the

guests had gone home, leaving Dina a choice of bedrooms.

On the fourth day after the ball she telephoned our house to ask if we possessed a hair dryer. When I answered that my aunt had given me one the previous Christmas, Dina's response was, 'Oh, marvellous. Could you bring it up right away?'

My mother was annoyed by what she called Dina's arrogance in expecting me to deliver the dryer to her, rather than fetching it herself, but I was glad of any excuse to go to Le Manoir.

In the hall I met Rupert. I had seen him every day since the ball, but always with Dina and Simon present, never alone. With Dina to gaze at, he had virtually ignored my existence. Now, although he had to notice me, his manner gave me no comfort.

'Hello, Anny. What brings you here?' he asked, as if I were an infrequent visitor rather than an habitué.

I explained my errand, wretchedly conscious that I had become an embarrassment to him.

'You'll find her in the Red Room,' he told me, before hurrying away as if on some urgent mission.

The Red Room was one of the best rooms with a bathroom *en suite*, and a mattress with interior springing on the Hepplewhite four-poster.

I tapped on the door and heard Dina call 'Come in.'

When I entered she was standing by the window in a robe of thin apricot silk, with a towel turbanned round her head.

'Sit down, Anny.' She waved me to a chair, and asked if I wanted a drink.

'No, thanks.' I watched her pour gin into a glass and top it up with lime juice and soda water. Then she lit a cigarette, and pulled off the towel, and began to dry her damp black hair.

She was as untidy as ever. Her belongings were all over the room. Seeing me looking at them, she began to talk about clothes.

'I never wear anything but black and white in the daytime now. Englishwomen are so stupid the way they let *Vogue* and *Harper's* bully them into wearing "Prune for Spring" or "Puce for Winter", or whatever,' she said scornfully. 'No wonder so few of them ever look properly put together. That green doesn't flatter you, Anny. You should wear subtle neutrals, not pastels.'

I picked up a black snakeskin shoe which was lying on its side by my chair while its fellow lay close to the bed. The gilt lettering on the insole had not yet been rubbed away. It was an Italian shoe, very plain and very expensive. Even I could recognise good shoes.

'What do you do for a living?' I asked her. 'You seem to be very successful.'

She shrugged. 'I prefer a few luxurious things to masses of cheap clothes. I expect you've got more shoes than I have. I never wear sandals except on the beach' - with a critical glance at my red sandals.

'Why not?'

She looked disdainfully amused. 'For the same reason that I wouldn't wear a home-made cardigan, or a pink bra, or a black nightie. Have you still got a crush on Rupert?'

The question caught me off guard. 'W-what d'you mean?' I stuttered, blushing.

Dina crushed out her cigarette. 'I was afraid you had. Well, I'm sorry to dash your hopes, Anny, but you'll have to find yourself another hero to worship. Rupert is going to marry me.'

I stared at her, my mind reeling.

After a while she drained her glass and began to coil her hair into a sleek Oriental bun which showed off her long, elegant neck.

'W-when did he ask you?'

'He hasn't asked yet. But he will. It's as good as settled.' She disappeared into the bathroom for a few moments, and returned with a pair of pale gauzy tights in her hand. 'Even if I hadn't come back, he would never have married you,' she informed me.

'Why not?'

'Because your grandfather was a fisherman and, here, that sort of thing matters. And before

you remind me that my mother was a Nazi whore, let me remind you that my father died for this island and is now in Valhalla with Rupert's lamented papa.'

I was shocked, not only by the way she spoke of her parents, but because I had thought she had changed, and now I could see she was still as unfeeling and selfish as she had been when we were children. Perhaps it was not altogether her fault, for although she had been much indulged, she had never received the love of firm, sensible parents. But whatever allowances one must make for her, the fact remained that she was not the kind of warm, gentle person to whom, if it would have made him happy, I could have borne to lose Rupert.

'Why Rupert?' I asked.

She shrugged. 'I'm not romantic like you. I want position and money, and a husband who is easy to manage. Rupert fits the bill perfectly. I don't know why I didn't consider him sooner.'

'You always used to be Simon's girl.'

'Not really. Simon and I were never starry-eyed about each other. He wanted a girl - any girl - and I found it amusing to tantalise him. It was rather a dangerous game, of course, but that's what made it exciting.' She paused, a smile on her lips. 'Who knows how it might have ended, but for Mrs Morris.'

'Who was Mrs Morris?'

‘Don’t you remember her? She was a red-haired artist who rented Bon Repos Cottage the summer before I went to Paris. Instead of seducing me, Simon was seduced by her.’

‘But she was quite old,’ I objected, recalling with sudden clarity a woman in tight green slacks strolling by the harbour wall, and the old men who sat there to gossip nudging and winking as she passed them.

‘In France boys of that age are encouraged to have a liaison with an older woman,’ said Dina carelessly. ‘It’s much better for them than fooling about with young girls. Not that I thought so then, of course. I was furious with her for making Simon lose interest in me. Now I think it’s probably a pity she didn’t take Rupert under her wing.’ She laughed, and flung off her robe and began to scent herself, not with sparing dabs behind the ears in the manner of Englishwomen, but spraying it all over her body with lavish puffs from an atomiser.

She slanted a sideways glance at me. ‘I suppose you think sex is rather horrid. You prefer the *spiritual* side of love.’ And she burst out laughing.

I stood up, and unplugged the dryer, and coiled the flex neatly round it. It was strange that I could behave so calmly when, inwardly, I was panic-stricken.

‘I must go home now.’

‘Thanks for the dryer. ‘Bye.’ As I passed her, she added sweetly, ‘Don’t do anything too desperate. There are other pebbles on the beach.’

Half way down the drive, I heard my name called and turned to see Simon following me. He was wearing a suit, and carrying his big leather grip. I had forgotten he was leaving Carlou today.

As he came within speaking distance, he said, ‘I’m coming to say goodbye to your parents.’

‘Are you going back to Tel Aviv?’

‘No, I’ve done my stint there. I’m off to Canada this time.’

‘That should be interesting for you.’ As we fell into step, I thought my face was a mask showing nothing of my feelings.

But after only a few paces, Simon hooked a hand round my arm and made me stand still and face him. ‘What’s up, Andelys? What’s wrong?’

I looked at the knot of his tie which was on a level with my eyes. ‘Nothing’s wrong exactly. I’m just rather . . . taken aback. Dina says she’s going to marry Rupert, and I don’t think she’ll make him happy. I know she doesn’t love him, and I don’t think he really loves her.’

‘But you do?’ Simon said quietly. ‘You do think you love him?’

‘I don’t only think it. I know it. I’ve *always* loved Rupert, and he felt the same until she

came. In four days, everything's changed. It's crazy . . . completely crazy.' Not wanting to break down and cry, I began to walk as fast as I could towards the gatehouse.

Had Simon been in a hurry I should have had to run, but to keep pace with me he had only to lengthen his stride slightly.

He said, 'I agree. It is crazy. But I don't think there's much anyone can do to stop it, not even the Admiral. In fact it's a measure of Dina's skill in handling men that she's managed to charm him as well. She came down to dinner last night in a black dress and wearing her father's Military Cross, which she claims to do every year on the anniversary of his death. The old boy was obviously impressed. Later on I heard him telling Foxy that he thought she had a great deal of character. He's right: she has - but perhaps not the kind of character which he thinks Rupert needs to brace him when he takes over.'

'Rupert doesn't need bracing,' I said indignantly.

Simon said, 'It's infatuation which is blind to all faults, Andelys. Not love. If you love a person you don't expect them to be perfect. If you're honest you've got to admit that Rupert has always had plenty of physical courage, but not quite as much of the moral kind.'

*Hello, Anny. What brings you here?* I remembered Rupert's discomfiture when we had



met in the hall, and his haste to escape from my presence.

‘And what is my particular flaw, oh Wise Observer of Human Nature?’ I asked sarcastically.

To my surprise, his reply was, ‘I don’t think you have any, or none that you won’t have outgrown in a year or two’s time.’ He paused. ‘I know you had to stay at home while your mother was recovering from her operation. But she’s well again now and you ought to get away from Carlou, Andelys. Even if Dina hadn’t come back, you’re too young and too inexperienced to settle for a lifetime with Rupert. A girl should have a taste of independence before she marries.’

‘You’re theorising,’ I retorted. ‘I’m not “a girl”, I’m me, and I’m not the independent type. Why must people always be made to conform to a pattern? When Miss Wallace was young girls who wanted independence couldn’t have it. Now it’s gone to the other extreme, and everyone has to have a job whether they want one or not. Why would working in an office in London be so much better and more useful than what I’m doing here?’

Simon lifted an eyebrow. ‘Who said anything about an office job in London?’

‘Where else would I go if I left home? What else could I do but office work?’

‘Any number of things, I should imagine. You’re not without talents.’

He went on talking, but I stopped listening. There was nothing he could say that I hadn’t heard a dozen times before from Mother.

Whether Sir Helier could or would have interfered with Dina’s plans was something never to be known. Three weeks later he was dead.

Dina had left the island a few days before this happened, but she came back to Carlou for the funeral, as did Simon, who had not gone to Canada after all. He returned to London immediately after the service, and the next day Dina went away. For a week I lived in a fool’s paradise, deluding myself that she had changed her mind, or had merely been teasing me, and that soon everything would be as it had been before. That Rupert did not seek me out was, I explained to myself, because he was deeply involved in assuming his new responsibilities.

Ten days after the funeral, Commander Fox paid a call on us. This was not uncommon in the winter months, but unprecedented during the season, and although he came in the afternoon lull when we had finished washing up the lunch things and not yet begun the preparations for supper, his appearance at the back garden gate

was enough to make Mother and me exchange questioning glances.

He was not a man to beat about the bush and, after a very brief exchange of civilities, he said, 'There'll be a notice in *The Times* tomorrow which will come as a considerable shock to many people here. Were you aware, Mrs Brelade, that Rupert is in London at present?'

'No,' said Mother, 'I wasn't. We haven't seen him recently. Not since the funeral.'

Commander Fox frowned at his shoes, which were always immaculately polished. 'What I came down to tell you is that when he comes home he will be accompanied by . . . his wife. He telephoned early this morning to tell me that he and Claudine Rozel were to be married by special licence later today.'

'*Oh, no!*' she exclaimed. 'Oh, how rash. I'm sure they're entirely unsuited. Couldn't *someone* have stopped them?'

'Rupert is his own master now, Mrs Brelade.' Commander Fox cleared his throat. 'They'll be abroad for about a month. He didn't say where they were going, merely that he would let me know the date of their homecoming. Meanwhile I know I can rely on you to exert your usual wise influence when you hear the matter discussed. Inevitably it will be the principal topic of conversation for some time to come, and equally inevitably there will be some

scandalmongering. Do what you can to quash it, won't you?'

'Of course,' said Mother. 'Of course I will. Thank you for letting us know.' She looked at me, her eyes full of loving pity. I realised she knew how I felt about Rupert. Perhaps everyone knew.

At the beginning of August my parents received a letter from Miss Wallace.

'Dear Mr and Mrs Brelade,' my mother read aloud, 'I find myself in need of an assistant and, as Andelys has always shown an interest in antiques, I wonder if she might like to make them her métier. At the present time I can offer only a very modest wage in addition to board and lodging. However, two or three years' experience with me could lead to a more remunerative post in a larger business. Perhaps the wisest course, if the idea appeals to her, would be for Andelys to come here for a trial period. Yours sincerely, Clementine Wallace.'

My father's reaction to this was, 'What put that idea into the old girl's head, I wonder? Anny has no need to go gallivanting off to the mainland to find something to do with her time. There's plenty of work for her here.'

'No, our present arrangement won't do any longer,' said Mother. 'I'm fully recovered now, and I want Andelys to have a proper career, not merely an occupation to pass the time until she

marries. Much as we shall miss her, I think it's high time she left home and saw something of the world. The island is gay enough in summer, but there's no life here in the winter for a girl of nineteen.'

'I can't see how she'll be any better off living with a crabby old maid in a curio shop,' Father retorted gruffly.

'Miss Wallace is anything but crabby, Remy.' Mother turned to me. 'What do you think of her suggestion?'

Not long ago my reaction would have been as unenthusiastic as my father's, but now I saw Miss Wallace's offer as a providential chance to escape a situation which would become even more unbearable when Rupert and Dina came back to Carlou.

'I think it's a marvellous idea,' I answered, to Father's astonishment.

So began my first serious argument with him, and it might have verged on a row had not Mother calmed us. 'Let's sleep on it, shall we, my dears?' she intervened soothingly.

They must have discussed it in bed, because by breakfast time the following morning Father had accepted the idea of my leaving home as soon as the season was over, but he had prevailed on Mother to put off a final decision until she and I had visited Miss Wallace and seen for ourselves where I should be living

and working. This visit took place ten days later, when there was a brief lull in our bookings.

Miss Wallace lived in a small market town in Hampshire, and her house overlooked a green surrounded on three sides by an access road, and on the fourth by the main road to London. The house was part of a terrace of eight tall, once-private houses, all of which now had other uses. Next to Abbey Antiques was a dentist, and next to him a solicitor. Number Four was a dignified dress shop selling cashmeres and tweeds to country people, and Five was a craft shop and art gallery. All the front doors led from the pavement into a long, narrow hall, and the ground floor at Abbey Antiques was occupied by the shop at the front, with a workroom and kitchen behind. Each house had a long, walled back garden. Miss Wallace's sitting-room was upstairs, over the shop, and she slept in the room above the workroom. My quarters would be the large attic with its two dormer windows, one overlooking the town and the other the country.

'I thought, being young, Andelys wouldn't mind the stairs, and now the room has been done up it looks rather nice, don't you think?' asked Miss Wallace, showing us the attic on the evening of our arrival.

'Charming,' Mother agreed. 'What a very pretty paper.'

'Simon chose it.'

‘Simon?’

‘He spends a week-end with me occasionally. I happened to mention that the attic needed decorating, and the next time he came he brought the wallpaper with him, and he also put it up for me. He’s a very practical young man as well as a clever one.’

‘Do you mean *our* Simon . . . Simon Herault?’ asked Mother. Clearly, like me, she had thought Miss Wallace was referring to somebody local.

Miss Wallace nodded. I thought she looked slightly embarrassed, but it must have been merely my fancy, for then her eyes began to twinkle. She said mischievously, ‘I believe he has a reputation for being a great charmer of *young* women, and from that some people might conclude he would have little time for *old* ladies. Indeed I did rather wonder if his helpfulness might have been stimulated by the fact that the dentist next door has a very attractive receptionist who sometimes sunbathes in the garden during her lunch hour. I don’t know how Simon contrived to make her acquaintance, but I do know he took her out to dinner on Saturday night, and she spent most of Sunday up here, helping him to paper.’

‘I’ve often suspected Simon of being a bit of a philanderer,’ said Mother, in an amused tone. But I thought she would not be amused if she

knew how his career as a charmer of women had begun.

While they went on talking, my thoughts drifted back to the year before Dina went away, and to the odd quirks of Fate on which our lives depended. Why had Mrs Morris chosen Carlou instead of Alderney or Sark? I wondered. Had she gone elsewhere, Simon might not have lost interest in Dina, and Dina would not have become bored and cajoled her grandparents to send her to Paris. And if Dina had stayed at home, and continued her dangerous game with Simon's emotions, the probable outcome – although upsetting to our elders – might have been, in the long run, a great deal better for the four of us. Dina and Simon were both restless, worldly people; as well matched as she and Rupert were ill matched. Where were they now, at this moment? Paris? Rome? Monte Carlo? Unquestionably, her idea of a honeymoon would be very different from mine. I had dreamed of lonely alpine meadows or deserted Hebridean beaches, of rambling, open-air days and feather-bed nights in country inns. With Dina as his bride, Rupert would find himself penned in expensive hotels and smoky nightclubs. Perhaps at first he wouldn't mind, but after a time –

Mother broke into my thoughts. 'Miss Wallace was talking to you, Anny.'



I apologised for my absence of mind, and presently we went downstairs. The next day it was arranged that I should begin my apprenticeship on the first of October.

On the journey home, I viewed with dread the time between the honeymooners' return and my departure, but it would have been selfish and unfair to Mother to leave before the end of our holiday season. As matters turned out, I need not have worried. A few days later Father heard from Commander Fox that Dina and Rupert had decided to prolong their wedding trip. From Bermuda they had cabled their plan to visit New York. They were unlikely to come home before mid-October.

I was not the only person to leave Carlou because of Dina. Gradually, over the years, Mrs Herault and my mother had become friends. Mother had already mooted to Father and me the awkwardness of being housekeeper to someone one had known, and never much liked, as a child. So it was with regret but not surprise that she received Laura Herault's announcement that, after more than two decades at Le Manoir, she was looking for another post.

'Isn't it possible to compromise, Laura? Must you continue to work? Couldn't you retire and stay here? Surely with the Admiral's legacy, and a little assistance from Simon, you could - '

‘No, no, the last thing I want is to be a burden on Simon,’ Mrs Herault interrupted firmly. ‘Besides, I’d be bored doing nothing.’

‘You wouldn’t have to be idle. In the summer you could run a tea shop for the day trippers. Your cakes and pastries would go like a bomb, as they say.’

‘That would occupy two or three months. What about the other nine?’

‘You could make things to sell in the season. I’m sure there would be a demand for attractive, inexpensive hand-made souvenirs.’

Mrs Herault considered the suggestion, but eventually she shook her head. ‘No, it wouldn’t do, Mary. I need more than that to keep me busy, and also I want to be nearer London so that Simon can visit me more easily. He feels it’s his duty to see me as often as possible, but I know – although he always denies it – that often it’s very inconvenient for him to come to Carlou. If I were working in the Home Counties we could see each other much more easily. I shall miss the island for a time, but, as you’ve so often said to Andelys, Carlou is not the only beautiful place to live. Parts of Surrey and Kent are delightful, and I feel I shan’t have too much difficulty in finding a post in a house not so very different from Le Manoir. Sir Helier had the foresight and kindness to leave me a splendid testimonial.’

Later, Mother said to my father, 'Poor Laura - what an upheaval for her; and after being virtually mistress of the house all these years, she may find it hard to adjust to being merely an *aide-de-camp*.'

'You'll miss her, Mary,' he said anxiously. 'With Anny away, and Laura gone, it looks like being a lonely winter for you.'

'I shall miss them - yes. I shan't be lonely. My best friend will still be here.'

Father looked puzzled until she added, '*You*, my dense dearest,' at which he looked pleased.

They smiled at each other, making me realise they would not miss me nearly as much as I should miss them. They would still have each other, and Le Colombier, and Carlou.

I left them and went for a walk. On hot afternoons in high summer the air was full of the scent of wild sage and honeysuckle. I remembered the stuffy, inland atmosphere of the place where I was going to live. At least there I should not be continually reminded of my lost love. Here, even the sight of a colony of Pisan snails on a clump of yellow-flowered sea radish was painful to me because it conjured the memory of Rupert in guffaws.

A pompous and not very popular retired Englishman had sprayed a similar clump of sea radish in the lane outside his suburban lobelia-and-standard-rose garden. The snails had

survived the spray, and invaded his flowerbeds. 'Serves the silly clot right!' Rupert had said to me, when we had finally stopped laughing. 'Foxy pooh-poohs the idea, but I think we ought to ban all poisonous sprays. I'm sure they're upsetting the balance.'

Would Dina share his concern about that, whatever might be allowed to happen elsewhere, on Carlou the balance of nature should always be preserved and defended? I could not imagine her taking the smallest interest in such matters.

On my last night at home I kissed Alice and Judy goodnight, a thing I had not done for years. They were Cobo dolls, made for me by my grandmother from unbleached calico and sawdust. It was said that the first Cobo dolls had been made a century ago in the Guernsey village of that name, and as far back as I could remember Alice and Judy, with their crudely painted features and traditional 'scoop' sunbonnets, had been the guardians of my sleep. Their stiffly-stuffed bodies and limbs made them uncomfortable bedfellows and it was Walter, my bear, who had slept with me while the dolls in their sprigged cotton dresses kept vigil against the foot-rail.

Now they lived on the highest of my bookshelves and although I seldom consciously noticed them, I knew I should miss their accustomed presence tomorrow when I was far

away in Miss Wallace's house on the mainland. For the first time, I really understood what it must have meant to my father to go to the war, leaving everything he loved behind him. But in the end he had come back, and I could never come back, except as a visitor.

My father had wanted to escort me to my new home, partly to see it for himself, and partly perhaps because he still saw me as a child, too young and sheltered to manage the journey unaccompanied. However, Mother dissuaded him from coming with me. With her usual wisdom, she must have sensed that the crossing to the mainland would be even more of an ordeal if I had to hide my misery from Father.

We said our goodbyes on the quay at White Rock, shortly before the ferry sailed, and I think it was a relief to all three of us when the mournful blare of the ship's siren signalled the moment of departure.

My last sight of the islands was as I leaned on the rail with thirty or forty big herring gulls gliding hopefully above the vessel's stern, and her props churning up a white wake which spread and eventually dissolved. From a distance, the islands looked like a school of great grey whales drowsing on the surface of the ocean. It was a long time before they faded from view, and when at last they had disappeared I went below to the Ladies where I washed the

streaks from my cheeks and combed my wind-tousled hair. Then I bought myself a beaker of tea, and chose a seat in the lounge, and opened a book which I read with determined concentration until we docked at Weymouth.

## PART TWO

1959 - 1963

By the end of my first month in England I was ten pounds slimmer than when I left home. This was not the result of moping and losing my appetite, but because Miss Wallace lived on home-made soups and salads, with fruit or cheese in place of the hearty pies and puddings without which my father considered a meal incomplete, and which I had eaten every day since my childhood. At first I missed Mother's good cooking, but quite soon my palate adjusted to the taste of raw carrots instead of cake, and to elderberry posset instead of milky cocoa at bedtime.

At this time it had not become necessary for an antique dealer to run a car and to scour the countryside for stock. As far as the provinces were concerned the impending boom in antiques had barely begun, and dealers such as Miss Wallace could still buy more than they could sell. Collecting, soon to become a fashionable mania, was indulged in by comparatively few people who could therefore afford to ponder each addition to their treasures because an eighteenth-century coffee can, a rare piece of

treen, or a fine sampler priced at five pounds might sit in a shop for a week or a month or much longer, instead of being snapped up at once.

Miss Wallace bought her stock from three main sources. These were the local weekly auction, the occasional country house sale, and the clearance of smaller, poorer houses after someone had died and when their relations had no use for or interest in their possessions.

In the matter of fetching and carrying, Miss Wallace depended on Alfred, a little old man with a handcart who, in spite of his malty breath and decrepit appearance, was generally reliable. Some of the things she bought never went into the shop but were stored in a shed in the garden to await the next visit of a specialist dealer, or a runner catering to specialists.

I began to learn 'the trade', as it was known, by dusting the shop.

'Never pick up a jug by its handle, dear,' Miss Wallace advised on my first morning. 'Handles sometimes break off. It's much safer to hold things like this' - and she demonstrated.

'What's this little gadget?' I asked presently, having come to a table on which various interesting objects were scattered on a velvet pad.

'Ah, now that's a napkin gripper. The hook would be fixed in the buttonhole of one's



waistcoat, and the corner of the table napkin would be clipped between these two small discs to prevent it slipping to the floor as double damask napkins were apt to do. As you see, it's hallmarked, so we can tell exactly how old it is.' She handed me a magnifying glass. 'Tell me what the marks are.'

I peered through the lens. 'An anchor.'

'Which is the town mark of Birmingham.'

'A lion.'

'The quality mark of sterling silver.'

'And a small letter *r*.'

'That's the date letter which you must look up in this book.'

The napkin gripper had been made in 1904, and Miss Wallace told me I might have guessed it was 'modern' as, had it been pre-1890, it would have had the Sovereign's Head duty mark, a point which she illustrated with the aid of a Victorian sugar castor and some George III spoons.

She was telling me that the penalty for counterfeiting hallmarks had been death until 1773 when it was reduced to fourteen years' transportation, when a customer entered. She was a collector of hands, and Miss Wallace was able to show her two; a hand-shaped brass paper clip, and a chubby child's hand, modelled in Parian china, with the fingers spread to hold rings. The woman bought the china hand for

seven shillings and sixpence, and I wrapped it carefully in tissue paper while she and Miss Wallace chatted.

Our next caller was the dustman who, having emptied the bin, rapped on the back door to ask if Miss Wallace was interested in a broken teapot he had found in someone else's dustbin. To my surprise, for I thought it a hideous object, Miss Wallace bought it.

'Now how old is this, d'you think?' she asked, after closing the door.

'Late Victorian?' I ventured.

'*Much* earlier, dear. This is tortoiseshell-glazed Staffordshire earthenware, made about 1750. I don't admire it myself, but I know someone who will like it.'

'Even with its spout broken off?'

'It can be mended. It would of course be worth more were it in mint condition, but not all collectors are wealthy and some will accept an imperfect piece if the price is adjusted accordingly. I expect Doctor Lovell will buy this. He has a passion for teapots. You'll find there are many keen collectors among medical men.'

About three weeks after my arrival, Miss Wallace did not come down to breakfast at the usual time. She had never been late before and after a while I began to feel rather alarmed by the stillness upstairs. Eventually I filled her cup with tea and carried it to her bedroom. My first

knock was followed by silence, but after I had tapped again there was a kind of muffled groan. I felt a sharp thrust of panic, but as I reached for the doorknob her voice called, 'Come in . . . come in.'

She was starting to sit up as I entered. 'Oh, dear, how extremely stupid of me,' she said, in a vexed tone. 'I forgot to set my alarm clock. I'm so sorry, Andelys dear. Did you think I might have pegged out?' - with a sudden twinkle in her eye.

'I did wonder if you were ill. Would you like a cup of tea?'

'Indeed I should. How very kind.'

She was wearing an old-fashioned nightgown of fine white cotton, much pin-tucked, with frills of *broderie anglaise* at the throat and wrists. As I already knew from the way she munched apples and carrots, she still had her own teeth, and with her white hair fluffed out and her round cheeks rosier than usual, one could see how charming she must have been in her girlhood.

'The fact is I was reading till all hours,' she confessed, as she sipped the tea. 'And at my age it doesn't do to burn the candle at both ends. No doubt *you* can read long past midnight, and bounce out of bed as bright as a button at seven.'

‘What were you reading which was so gripping?’

‘A book about poor Mary Stuart, always one of my heroines.’ She waved a hand at a thick book lying on her night table. Behind it, in a silver frame, was a photograph of a young man with such a fine, strong-boned face that I could not help staring at him.

‘That’s James, who would have been my husband,’ she explained, seeing my interest in him. ‘He was killed by a shell in the summer of 1916.’

‘Oh, Miss Wallace!’ My eyes filled with tears. At least my love was alive, even if lost to me. But if he were dead, how could I – how could anyone bear it?

‘My dear child, don’t be upset. It was such a long time ago. All wounds heal in forty-five years,’ Miss Wallace said gently.

I blinked and swallowed, embarrassed at showing my emotion. ‘Yes, I suppose so. But when you were young . . . at the time . . .’

‘Yes, at first it was a great anguish,’ she admitted gravely. ‘At the time, and for several years afterwards, it was as if there was never, never going to be another sunny day. If you can imagine a lifetime of grey, wet weather you can understand how we felt. For there were such hundreds of thousands of us. A whole generation of girls with no hope of being wives and mothers.

Some of them never recovered. They were left listless all their lives. What saved me was collecting, and I owe that to James - ' with a smiling glance at the photograph.

'How did collecting help you?'

'You see the specimen cabinet on top of that chest of drawers? Open the doors and bring the top tray, will you, please?'

I did as she instructed. The tray was covered with a piece of black velvet so that I could not tell what it contained. I placed it on her lap, and she patted the side of the bed, inviting me to sit by her.

She said, 'Bertrand Russell, the philosopher, once wrote: "The more things a man is interested in, the more opportunities of happiness he has and the less he is at the mercy of Fate, since if he loses one thing, he can fall back on another."' When I lost James, girls of my age and class had very few interests other than clothes and social engagements. However, one of the last presents he gave me was this - '

She turned back the velvet cover, revealing about a dozen sparkling buckles.

'They aren't diamonds, are they?' I asked breathlessly, when she had picked out the largest buckle and handed it to me. Some of the stones were a quarter of an inch square.

'No, they are antique paste stones, which are actually rather rarer than diamonds,

although less highly valued by most people. The buckle was made for the shoe of an eighteenth-century gentleman, but James bought it for me to wear on a belt. It's really too curved for that purpose, but I thought it pretty and was pleased with it. After he was killed, his presents became even more precious to me. I used to spend hours holding this, trying to relive our times together.' She paused, with a faraway look.

After some moments, she went on, 'One day I was in a bookshop, looking for a present for my father's birthday, when I noticed a book called *Old Paste* by A. Beresford Ryley. It had come out just before the war, and as I glanced through it I realised that James's buckle must be an example of old paste. I bought the book and when I had read it, I began to look in jewellers' windows for other examples. In a short time collecting paste had become a passion with me. To fall in love with beautiful objects is not, perhaps, as rewarding as loving another human being, but it made life bearable for me, and later when my poor father lost all his money, it enabled me to earn a living.'

She showed me the rest of the buckles, explaining which were the finest and why. Then I fetched another tray of earrings and brooches, and after that a tray filled with buckles of cut steel and silver. Without our noticing an hour passed, and it was only when we heard the

muffled jangling of the shop door-bell that we realised how long we had spent absorbed by the beauty of her treasures.

In the days that followed I often wished that, like Miss Wallace, I could fall in love with an object which would make life bearable for me. But although I admired many things which passed through our hands, nothing filled me with an overpowering longing to possess it.

One Sunday we walked home after Morning Service and saw a car outside the shop. In it, reading, was Simon.

'I hope you're going to ask me to lunch,' he said, smiling down at Miss Wallace, after we had greeted him.

'Of course, Simon. We're delighted to see you.'

During lunch, he told us that his mother had found an excellent post near Windsor and was leaving Carlou in ten days' time. To replace her, Dina had engaged a Spanish couple.

After lunch Miss Wallace went to rest in her room for an hour. Simon helped me to wash up and then, as the weather was still very warm for late October, we sat in deckchairs in the garden and finished the second of the two bottles of wine he had brought.

'Are you settling down, Andelys? Do you and Miss Wallace get on? Does the job suit you?'

‘Yes, yes and yes,’ I answered, determinedly cheerful.

‘You certainly look well. I always suspected there might be an elegant sylph waiting to emerge from the chrysalis of puppy fat. But don’t get *too* thin on all this rabbit food.’

‘Are you starving, Simon?’ Although a slice of cold quiche, salad, and a dish of stewed pears had been enough lunch for me, I suspected that he had hoped for a more substantial meal.

‘I wouldn’t refuse some more cheese and biscuits.’

I fetched them and, while he ate, he talked about television. It was not official yet, but he thought he had landed a job in a team of roving reporters supplying one of the major news programmes. It was the objective towards which he had been working from the beginning.

‘Yes, I remember the night you came to ask Mother’s advice, and Father thought you were crazy,’ I murmured, swallowing a yawn.

Soon afterwards I fell asleep. When I woke the other deckchair was empty and mine was in shadow, and I felt chilly and stiff. I folded the chairs and put them away in the outhouse. Miss Wallace had come downstairs and was making tea in the kitchen.

‘Simon couldn’t stay to have tea with us. He left about half an hour ago. He asked me to say goodbye to you for him, and to give you his



apologies for boring you,' she said with a slightly reproving expression.

'He didn't bore me! It was the wine and the warmth which sent me to sleep. He didn't go off in a huff, did he? How very unlike him.'

'No, he was amused, not annoyed,' she admitted. 'Nevertheless, I think you are a little casual with him, my dear.'

'Well, I've known him all my life. But I would have apologised, naturally, if he'd still been here. I suppose having done his duty – egged on by his mother, probably – now he's haring off to wine and dine one of his girl-friends. Who will hang on his every word and more than make up for my inattentiveness,' I added, smiling.

It was the following day that I came upon the little beaded bag. It was early closing day, and Miss Wallace had arranged to clear a small red-brick terraced cottage in a village a few miles away. We went there by bus and, later in the afternoon, Alfred turned up with his cart, and loaded the fine chest of drawers and two Hepplewhite chairs which Miss Wallace had seen in the bedroom during her inspection. The cottage had belonged to an old couple whose only relation was a butcher from Bermondsey. He had insisted on Miss Wallace making an offer for the entire contents as he did not want to be bothered with sorting out the place himself.

I was surprised that people in such humble circumstances – the lavatory was an outside earth closet, and there was no hot water or electricity in the cottage – should possess anything of value.

‘One can never tell,’ said Miss Wallace. ‘Old people who were in private service often have had things given to them by their employers.’

I found the bag in a hatbox beneath the high brass bedstead. Among other things the box contained a moleskin muff reeking of camphor balls, six pairs of unworn white drawers and two stiffly starched print aprons. The bag was wrapped up with some ribbons and other trimmings, and when I saw it I gave a little murmur of pleasure which made Miss Wallace turn and ask, ‘What have you found, dear?’

‘Only a beadwork purse, but isn’t it pretty?’

‘Charming: straight out of Jane Austen.’

By six o’clock we were dusty, tired and longing for a cup of tea. But amongst a great deal of worthless clutter we had found several interesting things including a seventeenth-century leather harvest ale keg, a Georgian corkscrew with a porcelain handle, and a small bowl daubed with blue splodges which I would have consigned to the rubbish had not Miss Wallace explained that it was a bleeding bowl of English delftware, as old as the harvest keg and of much greater value.

‘Alfred will deal with the rest,’ she said, as she locked the door behind us. ‘Things which are of no use to me, he can sometimes sell to scrap dealers and old clothes dealers.’

‘The bedstead was rather fun, with all those knobs and twiddly bits.’

‘Yes, extremely ornate, wasn’t it? And I hear that in London now fashionable decorators are launching a vogue for such things. They may well succeed. I can remember the time when only decorators were interested in Regency furniture. Connoisseurs wouldn’t look at it.’

Soon after we reached the bus stop a sports car passed us, stopped some distance further along the road, and reversed to where we were standing. A young man with red hair leapt out and came round the bonnet.

‘Hello, Miss Wallace. May I give you a lift?’

‘It’s very kind of you, Daniel, but is there room for two passengers and various bundles in your car?’ She introduced him. ‘Daniel is Doctor Lovell’s son. This is Andelys Brelade, my new assistant.’

We shook hands, and Daniel Lovell said, ‘It’s rather cramped in the back, I’m afraid. Would you rather wait for the bus, Miss Brelade?’

‘Oh, no, I don’t mind a squeeze.’

When we reached home Miss Wallace invited him in for a glass of sherry. I thought he was never going to leave.

‘You’ve made a conquest, I fancy,’ she said, with a smile, when at last he had gone.

I looked at her in amazement. In my indifference to him, it had not occurred to me that Daniel had overstayed his welcome for *that* reason.

Later I asked Miss Wallace what price she would put on the bead purse and, when she said seven and sixpence, I asked if I might buy it.

‘You may have it, my dear, if it appeals to you.’

That night in my room, as I examined my treasure more closely, I found that the tiny coloured beads which, being glass, had lost nothing of their original brightness, were not sewn to a backing material as I had supposed. Where the lining of the bag had come unstitched, it could be seen that in fact they were knitted into position, twenty-three beads side by side in the space of an inch. The needles on which it had been knitted must have been as fine as picture wire, I thought incredulously.

Next day I was ironing a blouse when Miss Wallace answered the telephone. Presently she came to the kitchen to tell me that Daniel Lovell was hoping I would go to the theatre with him.

‘I thought it wouldn’t be long before we heard from him again. I was right, you see.’ She was as pleased as I was dismayed.

‘But I don’t want to go to the theatre – at least, not with him. Oh dear, what excuse can I make?’

‘None without hurting his feelings. He knows you are free tonight, Andelys. He asked me if you were, and I said, Yes. Surely you can’t dislike him? I think he’s a charming young man.’

‘No, I don’t *dislike* him,’ I conceded. ‘But I don’t particularly like him either.’

‘You’ll enjoy the play, I feel sure. It will do you good to spend the evening with someone of your own generation, and it will give me an opportunity to invite Florence Palgrave to supper. She is such a bore, poor woman, that I haven’t done so since you’ve been here. But she pricks my conscience as she’s very lonely now her mother’s dead. Off you go to speak to Daniel’ – with a gentle push in the direction of the telephone.

As she had forecast, I did enjoy the play, which was a repertory company production of Terence Rattigan’s *The Winslow Boy*. On the way home we stopped at a country pub where, said Daniel, they served good snacks and hot jacket potatoes. He had beer and a home-made pork pie, and I had cider and a chicken drumstick. We discussed the play, and he told me about himself. Both his elder brother and his sister were following their father into medicine, but

Daniel was reading Botany with a view to becoming a garden designer.

‘Forty or fifty years ago I’d have been a plant collector like Forrest, the rhododendron chap. But there’s not so much scope now that places like Tibet are off limits, and anyway, one needs a private income or a patron,’ he told me.

He did not kiss me goodnight as I had wondered if he might. He took me out three times more, but he never kissed me. I suppose he sensed that although I liked him well enough as a human being, I felt not the slightest attraction to him as a man.

I did not go home for Christmas because my parents arranged for the three of us to spend the holiday with Aunt Ruth and her family. Miss Wallace always spent Christmas with the local Rector and his wife. So it was not until Easter that I returned to Carlou, and by then I was not quite as vulnerable as I had been the previous autumn. Six months away from home had not wrought any deep change in me, but my protective shell was a little thicker than it had been. Also I had become a collector, and had found, like Miss Wallace before me, that the pursuit and study of a certain category of objects could add a new dimension to life. For me, the catalyst had been the beadwork purse. My desire to know more about it had led me to the nearest museum which contained, in the reserves not

often seen by the general public unless they inquired, a fine selection of early nineteenth-century beadwork ranging from tasselled miser purses to bead-covered needle-cases. I learned how bead knitting was done from *Mary Thomas's Knitting Book*, and not long after I had borrowed this work from the library, I bought a second-hand copy of a companion volume, *Mary Thomas's Embroidery Book*, published four years before my birth and, as I discovered presently, the bible of countless needlewomen. It opened my eyes to types of embroidery of which I had never heard – Hungarian Point, Mountmellick, Trapunto and Indian Shadow Work – and when I sailed homeward from Weymouth to spend Easter with my parents, I spent the crossing working on a sampler of drawn fabric stitches.

I had been at home for some hours before Mother remarked, in a casual way, 'You won't see Rupert while you're here. He's gone to Denmark for a week.'

My response was equally casual. 'Oh, really? What takes him there?'

'He's speaking about our wild life to a conference of conservationists. Dina hasn't gone with him.' She paused. 'Will you go up to see her tomorrow?'

'Of course. I'm curious to see what alterations she's made.'

I didn't know whether to be relieved or sorry that Rupert was away from home. After making up my mind that I must and would call at Le Manoir, it was something of an anti-climax to find that he would not be there. I hungered to see him again, yet I was afraid that to do so would only revive the agonies I had suffered last autumn. I was still very unhappy at times, but no longer unhappy *all* the time.

Next morning, about half past ten, I set out for Le Manoir. This spring it was not Swinburne's lines which made my eyelids prickle as I walked up the drive. Omar Khayyam seemed more appropriate.

*Alas, that Spring should vanish with  
the Rose!  
That Youth's sweet-scented Manuscript  
should  
close!  
Ah, Love! Could thou and I with Fate  
conspire  
To grasp this sorry Scheme of Things  
entire,  
Would not we shatter it to bits - and  
then  
Re-mould it nearer to the Heart's  
Desire?*

It seemed strange to ring the bell and wait for someone to admit me to a house which, until



recently, had been my second home, and where I was accustomed to coming and going without ceremony.

Presently I heard footsteps crossing the hall, and the door was opened by a man in a grey alpaca coat and dark trousers. Intimidated by his unsmiling face and formal bow, I said nervously 'Good morning. I'm Andelys Brelade. Is Di - is Lady Fontaine at home?'

'She is expecting you, mees. Please come in.'

At the top of the staircase, he surprised me by turning left towards the west wing which, in my time, had never been used except as a storage place.

'If you will wait here, please, I will tell her ladyship you have come.'

He showed me into a room which made me gasp in astonishment. Formerly almost empty, its only furnishings a bedstead and a frayed and faded ottoman, it had been transformed into a dramatically modern sitting-room.

Almost everything in it was white; the shaggy carpet, the tweed curtains, the two vast crescent-shaped sofas encircling the large low table made of thick plate glass supported by a giant coil of chromium tubing. The sofas were covered with glove-fine white leather and their soft, cream-puff contours were quite different

from the unyielding horsehair-stuffed curves of the club chairs and chesterfields in the library.

The only colour in the room came from two enormous abstract paintings, and from a bright lime-green telephone and various lime and lemon ash-trays and cigarette boxes. There was nothing I had ever seen before, and I felt that, although very striking, such a décor was totally alien to the spirit of the house.

I had to wait twenty-five minutes before Dina joined me, and after the first fifteen had passed, I began to wish I hadn't come.

She swept into the room with a suddenness that startled me. I had resented being kept waiting, but her appearance and her manner disarmed me. She was wearing a white shirt and trousers with a scarlet waistcoat matched by her lipstick and nail lacquer. But her make-up could not conceal how much she had changed, how ill she looked.

Her manner was disconcertingly warm. 'Anny, how nice to see you. I hoped you would come. I get so bored when I'm alone here, but for the time being - '

She was interrupted by the butler bringing in a tray of coffee and cakes for me. On her side of the table he placed a jug of iced water and two or three plain biscuits.

‘*Gracias*, Domingo.’ She waited until he had gone before she said, ‘If you’re wondering why I look so ghastly, it’s because I’m pregnant.’

If I had given the matter any thought, I would have expected Dina to postpone having children as long as possible, and certainly not to start a baby in her bridal year.

Seeing my surprise, she shrugged. ‘I’ve obviously got to produce a son and heir some time, so I might as well get it over. The younger one is, the less it damages one’s figure.’

‘Well . . . congratulations,’ I said hollowly. ‘Rupert must be pleased, isn’t he?’

‘He’s like a dog with two tails. *He* isn’t sick every morning. That’s why I kept you waiting just now. I’m not only morning-sick, I’m afternoon- and evening-sick as well.’

‘Oh, dear, how horrid. Can’t the doctor give you something to stop it?’

‘Apparently not. He did prescribe some pills, but they had no effect on me. It’ll stop by itself in a week or two, so they tell me. Anyway, let’s not talk about it. What do you think of my boudoir? Isn’t that Ortega fabulous?’ – waving a hand at the larger of the two paintings.

Privately, I thought it a meaningless daub, not to be compared with the beautiful eighteenth-century watercolours in other parts of the house.

Presently she showed me her bedroom, which was even more bizarre than the boudoir. The ceiling and walls were draped with Oriental fabric, and the bed was a Persian-carpeted dais piled with cushions, so that, but for the incongruous view from the windows, it might have been the pavilion of a sheikh. At night, windows hidden and the Moorish brass hanging lamps alight, the illusion would be complete. And who better than Dina to fill the role of Scheherazade? But somehow I couldn't see Rupert at ease in this setting. Simon – yes. But not Rupert with his blue-eyed, young Viking looks.

As I finished looking about me, I found myself under appraisal.

'You've changed, Anny,' Dina said thoughtfully. 'Simon mentioned how much you'd improved when he came to help his mother move to England. You've got over Rupert by now, I expect? I knew you would, once you'd fined down and acquired a few boy-friends. It's done you good, leaving home. Aren't you glad you've spread your wings at last? You wouldn't want to come back, would you?'

'No, I don't want to come back,' I agreed, without expression.

'You should be grateful to me, actually. If you and Rupert had married, it wouldn't have been the idyll you probably imagined. He's the

most abysmally dull lover,' she said, with a shrug. 'Years ago, Simon knew more about pleasing women than Rupert will ever learn.'

I felt a wave of disgust. Had she no loyalty, and no reticence? How could she speak of him like that, and how would he feel if he had overheard her?

'But I'm not complaining. I married him for other reasons. Come and see my bathroom,' she said.

'Has Dina made many changes?' asked Mother, when I returned to our house.

'Not many so far. There hasn't been time, and she's not very well at the moment. But next week a firm from the mainland are coming to dig up the croquet lawn and put in a swimming pool, and everywhere will be altered before Dina's finished.'

'It must be costing a mint of money,' was my mother's comment, when I had described the changes in the west wing. 'No wonder Commander Fox looks so worried nowadays. To a man of his frugal temperament, watching Rupert indulge Dina's whims must be really distressing.'

'He won't have to watch for much longer. He's about to be pensioned off, and his rooms converted into nurseries.'

'But surely there are nurseries now?'

‘Yes, but not as conveniently placed as poor old Foxy’s quarters. He’s going to be offered a house Rupert owns in Hauteville.’

‘I’m sure he expected to spend his retirement here,’ said Mother. ‘The fact of the matter, I suppose, is that Dina wants to get rid of him . . . feels he’s a repressive influence. It was wrong of her to tell you this before Rupert has spoken to him. That girl has no sense of form . . . no regard for people’s feelings. If the Commander knew that we knew, it would upset him very much.’

In September I went home again while Miss Wallace spent a week in Scotland with a friend of her youth whom she visited every year. Almost twelve months had passed since my last encounter with Rupert, but when I reached Carlou I found that this time they would both be away from the island throughout my visit.

‘They left a message for you,’ said Mother. ‘You are to make use of the pool whenever you feel like it. The rumour is that it cost over two thousand pounds, and the gardeners say it’s fit for Hollywood.’

‘No one else has seen it,’ growled Father. ‘The Fontaines entertain often enough, but no one who lives here is ever asked up to the house now. You can count yourself highly honoured, Anny.’

On my third day at home, my curiosity overcame my scruples. I went to look at the swimming pool. The gardeners had not exaggerated. It was of Hollywoodian opulence; a huge, sparkling blue pool with a flight of steps into the shallows, a diving board and chute at the deep end, and along one side a fanciful white Gothic pavilion filled with luxurious cane loungers with blue and white squabs.

On the glassy surface of the water there floated two bubble-like air-chairs and, presently, while I was reclining in one of them and propelling myself in lazy circles, I saw Domingo approaching with a tall glass on a salver.

As I paddled to the pool's edge, he bowed. 'Good morning, *señorita*. It is very hot today. You would like a cold drink?' – bending to place the glass within my reach.

When I had thanked him, he added, 'We have instructions to show you the rooms for the baby if you wish to see them.'

'Thank you, Domingo, but I'm not sure that I shall have time for that today.'

I watched him walk away. Did I want to see nurseries prepared for a child which might have been my child?

Sipping the ice-cold fresh orange juice, I resumed my leisurely revolutions. After a while it struck me that one could become very bored kicking one's heels in a two-thousand-pound

swimming pool. Pools might be fun for parties of people, and ideal for girls who swam the breast-stroke with their shoulders above the surface so as not to get water inside their bathing caps; but for someone on her own, as I was, to whom wet hair was unimportant compared with the pleasure of seal-diving through white-fringed rollers, the ocean was infinitely preferable.

When I had dried and dressed, I approached the house by way of the kitchen garden. From there I could hear several people speaking what I took to be Spanish. They seemed to be all talking at once, loudly and with frequent bursts of laughter. I knew from Mother that, in addition to Domingo and his wife, Dina had imported three more Spaniards and dismissed the two island women who had done 'the rough' during Mrs Herault's regime.

The Spaniards were enjoying the sun in the courtyard outside the kitchen. They were sitting round a table, cleaning silver, and at first they did not see me as I paused under the old brick archway. There was an older woman, a man in his middle twenties, and two girls of my own age or younger.

When I said 'Good morning', the girls jumped and gave startled exclamations. But the woman stood up and smiled at me. She said, in English, 'You have come to see the rooms, *señorita*? I will show you. I am Maria.' And she



stripped off the rubber gloves which had protected her hands from being soiled by tarnish.

The kitchen, unchanged for years, had been elaborately modernised, but Maria did not seem to think I would be interested in her domain. She led me upstairs to Foxy's rooms, now transformed into a self-contained suite for the baby and his or her nurse. Maria seemed to derive as much pleasure from pointing out all the refinements as if it had been her own infant who would lie in the costly white-draped cradle, wearing hand-stitched gowns fit for a princeling, and nappies laundered in the fully automatic washing machine.

Soon after my holiday at home I went to see Mrs Herault. She was working for a couple who, in spite of being well into their seventies, continued to practise their professions, and to entertain friends and colleagues. The husband was an architect who specialised in the restoration of ancient buildings, and his wife was an engraver and illustrator. They had a large creeper-clad house but were often in London during the week. Mrs Herault lived in a flat above the garage.

I thought she looked tired, and had aged more than one would expect in the months since we had last seen each other. But she seemed to

be happy, and certainly the flat was most comfortable.

I asked her if she missed the island, and she said, 'No, hardly at all. I think one needs more than beautiful surroundings to make one contented. On the island, my only friend was your mother. Here, I've already made a number of friends and my life is altogether fuller than it could be in a tiny place like Carlou. For instance, I'm learning to weave at evening classes. And you, Andelys - do you find you still miss your home?'

'Less than I did,' I admitted. 'I think I should miss it more if I had a less interesting job. It's funny the things which make one homesick. I once felt terribly homesick because of a herd of cattle. They were the black and white ones - I think they're called Friesians - and they looked such galumphing great beasts compared with our lovely little silky, honey-coloured cows. Also English cattle look so hostile, and ours never do. It's because ours are tethered, I suppose. I expect English cows are quite friendly, but they haven't the same large soft eyes and amiable expressions.'

One morning in November, Miss Wallace folded *The Times* and passed it across the breakfast table, tapping what she wished me to read with the tip of the antique silver skewer she used to open her letters.

The item she indicated was half way down the Births column. *Fontaine. On November 3<sup>rd</sup> at the London Clinic, to Claudine (née Rozel) and Rupert, a son (Peter Helier).*

Peter Fontaine was christened in London at a fashionable ceremony to which both Miss Wallace and I received invitations. However, we did not attend as Miss Wallace had a previous engagement and, when the day came, I was suffering from a heavy cold and thought it best to keep my germs to myself. Several newspapers carried photographs of Dina wearing a spectacular Cavalier's hat of dark velvet with pale ostrich feathers curling over the brim, and smiling brilliantly at the camera. Of the infant in her arms, little could be seen but a tuft of dark hair showing above the spindrift folds of a Shetland shawl, and the long skirts of the Fontaine christening robe, a lovely example of Ayrshire work, first used in 1811.

I saw the baby in person when I went home for Christmas. He was dark and French-looking with nothing of his father in his appearance. He was in the care of a nurse. His parents were spending Christmas in Tobago.

When I returned to the mainland there was a parcel from India waiting for me. It contained a sari-length of rose gauze with a border of silver threads. Among the folds was a card. *Happy Christmas - Simon.*

It was three months before we saw him again. He came, without warning, on a wet March night when I was alone in the house. Miss Wallace was at a bridge supper.

When the bell rang, I was curled snugly in the red wing chair with a new book by Georgette Heyer which Miss Wallace had finished the night before and which it was now my turn to enjoy. I had a bowl of apples at my elbow, and a glass of plum port in a beautiful goblet. The log fire was burning merrily and, having had a bath earlier, I was wearing pyjamas and a dressing-gown. So my response to the door-bell was a muttered curse at being disturbed, and even when I opened the door and saw who was standing on the step, my welcome was prompted more by politeness than enthusiasm.

‘We thought you were still in Nepal,’ I said, as Simon shed his wet raincoat and draped it over the newel post. ‘When did you get back?’

‘Early this morning.’

‘Only this morning?’ I echoed, surprised that he should come to see us so soon. Usually he spent at least two nights with his mother.

The thought of Mrs Herault pricked my conscience. Because she was, in a sense, a fellow-exile from Carlou, I had meant to keep in closer touch with her. But although the distance between us was not far as the crow flew, the

journey by bus was inconveniently roundabout, and I had postponed paying another visit to her.

‘Have you seen your mother? How is she?’ I asked, as we entered the sitting-room. ‘It must be several weeks since I last heard from her.’

‘Yes, I expect so,’ he said, and something in his voice made me check and look over my shoulder.

The light in the hall was a dim one, but now in the brighter light of the sitting-room I saw in his dark eyes a look which made me exclaim apprehensively, ‘What is it, Simon? What’s happened?’

Before he answered I knew only something terrible could have engraved that haggard mask on his good-looking, deeply tanned face.

‘Could I have a drink, do you think? It’s raw out tonight.’

In spite of the warmth of the room, he was shivering.

‘Of course.’ From the tantalus on the side-table I lifted the decanter labelled whisky, and poured a stiff measure into a tumbler. Then I added a short burst of soda. Usually Simon liked his whisky on the rocks, American-fashion, but tonight I didn’t bother to go to the kitchen for ice. I felt that whatever was wrong made a tepid whisky unimportant.

He was by the fire, warming his hands, when I handed him the glass. Our fingers

touched. His felt frozen. He drained the glass in two long gulps which was not his usual style at all, and then handed it back to me and I refilled it.

As I gave it to him, he said, 'Mother was cremated this morning. I missed the funeral by an hour.'

*'Cremated . . . 'I couldn't believe it.*

He sat down in the chair where I had been reading so peacefully minutes ago. 'She'd been ill for months,' he said dully. 'Nobody guessed. No one had any idea. Two weeks ago she had an emergency operation, but it was much too late for them to do anything. They tried to persuade her to send for someone. She had given my father as her next of kin and they didn't know she had a son until she changed her mind and told them about me. That was only hours before she died, and she was confused and thought I was still in Teheran. By the time I got word - ' He left the sentence unfinished.

I stood like a dummy, staring at him. I had known old people who had died, but that one expected and accepted. Mrs Herault was not - had not been - an old woman. She was middle-aged merely, like Mother. I could not believe that a woman who, last time I saw her, had shown no sign of serious illness had now ceased to exist, was reduced to ashes, gone for ever.

Too shocked to measure my words, I said the first thing which came into my head. 'Your father? Was he in time?'

Simon shook his head, and swallowed another mouthful of spirit. 'He died seven years ago. She didn't know that, but I did. When I found out, I didn't tell her. She always hoped that when he was old he would come back to her. I thought she needed that hope. She hadn't much to keep her going.'

'She had you. She was terribly proud of you.'

His face clenched with pain and grief. 'And I wasn't there when she needed me.'

I could think of no way to comfort him. Although it was not his fault that he had not been with her when she died, he would always feel himself to blame. Anyone would in his place.

After a pause, I asked, 'Have you had anything to eat today?'

He was staring into the fire, and his first response to my question was a glance of blank incomprehension as if 'eat' was a word he had never heard before.

'I don't know. Perhaps,' he said vaguely.

'I'll make you an omelette. You must eat, even if you don't feel hungry.'

In the kitchen I prepared a light supper for him; a cheese omelette, brown bread and butter, celery, a pot of tea. But when I returned, Simon's

head was lolling against the wing of the old saddlecheek chair. Worn out by the physical strain of the long hurried journey back to England, and by the deep mental stress of arriving too late, he had fallen asleep.

I was looking at his tired brown face when I heard Miss Wallace coming in, and I hurried to intercept her before she entered the room with a cheerful greeting which might rouse him.

‘He can have my bed and I’ll sleep on the sofa,’ I said presently, as we drank the tea in the kitchen.

‘Yes, he’s far too tall for the sofa,’ Miss Wallace agreed. ‘But if he’s still fast asleep I think we shouldn’t disturb him. We can slip a stool under his legs, and tuck plenty of blankets round him so that he won’t feel cold when the fire dies.’

I banked up the fire to keep the room warm as long as possible, and we wrapped his tall frame in various coverings, and I put a note on the table to tell him that, should hunger wake him, there was a flask of coffee and ham sandwiches in the Aga-warmed kitchen. Then leaving one table lamp alight so that if he woke he would see where he was and not flounder about in unfamiliar darkness, we left him and went to bed.

I could not sleep for thinking of Mrs Herault. Obviously it had been her wish to spare Simon



the anxiety of knowing that his mother was gravely ill. But had she not concealed her symptoms, had she gone to a doctor at the first sign of something amiss, perhaps she could have been cured. And although by concealing his existence, she had relieved him of the painful memory of her death, she had also imposed a lifelong burden of regret on him.

About one o'clock in the morning, knowing that I had reached the stage of being overtired, I went softly downstairs to heat some milk. At the turn of the first landing, I heard a slight noise below and saw that the kitchen light was on. From half way down the lowest flight I could see, through the half open door, Simon sitting at the table. But he was not drinking the coffee or eating the sandwiches we had left for him. He was slumped with his head on his arms, and his shoulders were heaving as if he had difficulty in breathing. As the sound he was making was only like someone out of breath, and as all my ideas about men were influenced by Rupert, I did not realise at once that Simon was crying.

When I understood the cause of those convulsive movements, my reaction was a mixture of shock, pity and indecision. My instinct was to rush down and comfort him, but I was held back by the fear that instead of accepting my compassion he might be embarrassed, and

angry with me for intruding on him. After some moments, I retreated stealthily upstairs.

Next morning I overslept, and went down to find Miss Wallace and Simon finishing their breakfasts. He looked tired, but less tense than last night. He rose as I entered the room and began to clear his things from the table to make room for me. The sun was shining. After a week of blustery rain, the weather had changed.

Presently, looking out of the window, Simon said, 'I feel like a walk. Will you come with me, Andelys? - Or are you too busy?'

I looked at Miss Wallace. 'Can you manage without me for an hour or two?'

'Certainly, my dear. The fresh air will do you good. You've been indoors too much lately.'

We left by the door in the wall at the end of the garden, and followed the footpath which skirted the boundary of the churchyard and led to a quiet country road with little or no traffic. For ten minutes or more our conversation was confined to random remarks about the weather and the daffodils growing among the gravestones and in cottage gardens. But presently, feeling that he would not have asked for my company if he were not in the mood to talk, I said diffidently, 'Simon, last night you mentioned your father. What was the mystery about him? Or would you rather not discuss it?'

‘He was French,’ said Simon. ‘He came from the south, from the Languedoc. He should never have married. He had incurable wanderlust. He did try to settle down with my mother, but when I was a few months old he couldn’t stand it any longer. He wanted to see South America. Mother could have gone with him, but she wasn’t the adventurous type. An unsettled, unplanned life would have been as impossible for her as her kind of life was for him.’

‘So you’re half French, like Dina,’ I said. ‘Did you always know about your father?’

‘Yes, practically always. There was never really any mystery. It was merely Mother’s natural reserve. I expect she would have told your mother, had the subject ever been broached. Possibly your mother hesitated to ask in case I was illegitimate. Attitudes have changed a lot in our time.’

‘How did you feel about your father? Did you hate him for leaving you?’

‘Not really. I never knew him, so I never missed him. As I grew up I began to understand how he felt because I also wanted to travel. For a time I was inclined to blame Mother for not being prepared to go with him. In their day it was considered a woman’s obligation to adapt herself to whatever kind of life her husband wanted.’

‘Yes, but men had an obligation to support their wives and children.’

‘He didn’t leave us entirely in the lurch. He made an erratic living photographing and writing about the plants and animals and people in the places he visited. Before the war he sent money fairly regularly. Not enough to support us, perhaps, but as much as he could spare. Also we could have lived with my widowed grandfather. It was Mother’s choice to be independent.’

‘You said she always hoped he would come back to her eventually. How did you find out that he wouldn’t?’

‘I met a journalist who had covered the Indo-China War, including the final siege at Dien Bien Phu. He said I reminded him of someone, and after a bit he remembered who it was: a paratroop colonel who had died of wounds shortly before the French surrender. Once I knew that, it wasn’t difficult to fill in the gaps. My father was still in his twenties when the war in Europe broke out, so naturally he came back and joined the Free French. Probably, had it been possible, he and Mother would have made a fresh start together. But by then she was cut off on Carlou.’

‘I’m not sure you were right to keep his death from her. She couldn’t have had *very* much hope that he would come back, and surely there would have been some satisfaction knowing he’d achieved a colonelcy?’

‘There was another consideration. She was his legal wife, but not his official wife. In 1948 he went through a form of marriage with a Frenchwoman, the widow of a brother officer with three children. So you see why I felt it was better to let sleeping dogs lie.’

In the night I had repressed my instinct; this morning I did not restrain my impulse to comfort him. He was walking with his hands in his pockets, and I tucked my hand in the crook of his elbow, and said, ‘What a wretched secret to have to keep. But one can’t altogether blame him, and anyway, people are not responsible for their parents’ mistakes.’

Simon took his hand from his pocket. For a disconcerting moment I thought he was going to reject my impulsive gesture. Then, to my surprise, he put his arm round my shoulders.

The action reminded me of Rupert, for it had been a habit of his to rest an arm on my shoulders when we stopped on our rambles to watch a sea-bird or an aeroplane flying over. I felt the old ache inside me, not as painful as it had once been, but still there, like a sensitive tooth which no longer hurt all the time but only when something jarred the nerve.

As if the thought of Rupert had somehow communicated itself to Simon, he said, ‘I imagine my mother’s relationship with my father was something like Rupert’s with Dina: a fatal

attraction overriding all common sense.' He glanced down at me. 'Are you getting over him?'

'I think so . . . gradually. I enjoy my job very much, and I like living with Miss Wallace. It was such a godsend, her offer. I don't know what I should have done, or where I should have gone otherwise. I couldn't have stayed in Carlou.'

'Something would have turned up, I expect.'

Later, returning from our walk by another way, we stopped at a pub, The Wagtail. There was a small fire burning in an old-fashioned grate in the Saloon, and a large plain clock with Roman numerals ticking peacefully on the wall. There was no one else there, although we could hear a conversation going on in the Public Bar.

As Simon ordered our drinks and exchanged a few commonplaces with the landlady, I studied his profile and remembered how, years ago, I had wondered if he might be the son of a gypsy. That romantic theory had been unexpectedly close to the truth, for his father seemed to have been as footloose as any gypsy, and obviously Simon had inherited the same wanderlust. How much of his mother was there in him? Physically, their only resemblance was - had been - the slate grey colour of their eyes. Thinking about Mrs Herault, I wondered how, loving the Frenchman, she could have refused to follow him to South America. Even if her common sense had

rejected a vagrant life in the tropics, particularly with an infant in tow, surely having married the man she should have gone with him and made the best of things?

My thoughts drifted between the past and the present, and when Simon said, 'What are you thinking about?' I answered truthfully, without pausing to consider the wisdom of speaking my mind.

'I was wondering if all our lives would have been quite different if Mrs Morris hadn't come to Carlou.'

He raised an eyebrow. 'I don't see how Mrs Morris determined our destinies. I didn't know you ever met her.'

'I didn't.' Inwardly I cursed my unguarded tongue. 'Perhaps it wasn't true anyway.'

'What wasn't true?'

'Dina said . . . Dina told me that you lost interest in her because of Mrs Morris. But perhaps she was making it up to shock me.'

'It was true,' he admitted, without embarrassment. 'But I still don't see how it impinged on the rest of you.'

'You and Dina might have been the ones to marry.'

'Not a chance,' Simon said with conviction. 'I would have married Flora Morris if I'd been old enough, and if she would have had me. That's

how I know you'll get over Rupert – because I got over Flora.'

'You loved her?' I said incredulously. 'But she was years older than you.'

'That was part of her charm. With rare exceptions young girls are too self-conscious to put young men at ease. An older woman is at ease with herself and therefore with everyone else. When I used to go to Bon Repos, Flora would be wearing a fisherman's slop or a *djellabah* or her grandmother's nightdress dyed purple. There'd be a *cassoulet* in the oven, or she might be cooking a curry. She'd give me some beer or wine, and we'd talk and laugh a great deal. She would have suited a man like my father, but she'd married the manager of a shoe shop, and they hadn't had children, and he hadn't encouraged her in her painting. Not that she had a great talent, but if people want to express themselves it's a pity to throw cold water on them.'

'Did you ever meet her again?'

He shook his head. 'I wonder how Dina knew? I suppose she spied on us. She's capable of anything.' He paused, and added, 'The only way Flora could have influenced our futures would have been to take Rupert under her wing. It would have made him a good less susceptible to Dina later on, but would your illusions have been any less shattered? I think not.'



One day in September, in London, I had been to the Needlewoman shop to buy Bisso linen and threads when outside Aquascutum, not looking where I was going but at an elegant woman on the other side of Regent Street, I collided with a big fair man who grabbed me by the arm to steady me.

‘I say, I’m most frightfully sorry. Have I hurt you? Good lord! – Anny!’

‘*Rupert!*’ It was two years since I had seen him. The shock was enormous.

He picked up the parcel I had dropped. ‘You’re the last person I expected to meet.’

‘You, too. Is Dina here with you?’

‘No. No, Dee’s in Paris, buying clothes.’ A worried look clouded his face.

It was so fleeting a shadow that another person might not have noticed. But I recognised Rupert’s expressions as easily as I sensed my parents’ moods. That troubled look, brief as it was, made me wonder if perhaps he was beginning to rouse from the thrall in which Dina had held him. Always my mother had forecast the failure of the marriage before long, but her judgment was biased by her implacable dislike of Dina.

‘How is Peter?’ I asked.

Even a stranger would have known him for a devoted father. His eyes shone with pride and

affection as he said, 'He's coming along splendidly. He's a marvellous little chap.'

After that we stood for some moments silently gazing at each other until Rupert said, 'How about having lunch with me? Or are you already spoken for?'

'No, I'd like to.' I had been intending to go by Underground from Piccadilly to Knightsbridge where a fruit drink at Harrods' health bar was the lunch I had planned for myself.

He relieved me of my other parcels and, grasping me firmly by the elbow, began to look for a taxi. Then whatever had been in his mind was replaced by another idea.

'I know where we'll go - if you don't mind walking a short distance?'

'Not a bit.'

In the bliss of seeing him again, I could have walked to Cockfosters and back.

It was a measure of my confusion and excitement that we had been in the restaurant for five minutes before I recognised the place.

'Rupert, surely this is where we - ?'

He nodded. 'It seems a long time ago, doesn't it?'

'It *is* a long time ago.'

'You've changed a lot since I last saw you. You've become such a dasher I nearly didn't recognise you,' he said.

It was not a graceful compliment. Had Simon heard it, his eyebrow would have lifted and his lips twitched. But in my opinion the nicest men didn't pay smooth compliments. Rupert's clumsy praise pleased me far more than Simon's occasional adroit flatteries. I knew Rupert meant what he said. Simon's compliments were part and parcel of his attitude to women in general. Clearly he divided the female sex into three categories. There were older women, such as Miss Wallace, to whom he was genuinely kind and considerate; and there were younger women who were either amusing playthings or not. I was not, but he was fond of me in a brotherly way, and now and again he made a pretty speech to boost my morale.

'What brings you to London if Dina is in Paris?' I asked.

'I've been poaching on Simon's preserves. I was on television last night.'

'Really? I do wish we'd known. We could have watched you. We haven't a set of our own, but Miss Palgrave lets us see hers if there's something specially interesting.'

'I hadn't much warning myself. It was a discussion about wild life. They only asked me to take part because no one else was available. What a nerve-racking experience it was! Simon may take it in his stride, but I needed a couple of stiff gins beforehand.'

‘Yes, I should think it must be rather terrifying.’

‘And you? What brings you to London?’

‘This morning I’ve been at the Guild – the Embroiderers’ Guild in Wimpole Street – and this afternoon I’m going to the V. & A. for a couple of hours.’

‘Sounds very impressive. What’s the V. & A.?’

‘Oh, Rupert – the Victoria and Albert Museum, of course!’ The V. & A. was so basic to my personal vocabulary and that of everyone I knew that I was amazed at his ignorance of the contraction.

‘Good lord, is two hours in a museum your idea of fun now?’ he asked teasingly. ‘You always used to be an outdoor girl.’

‘So I am still – some of the time.’

We were sitting side by side on the banquette, as we had that night long ago when we were children, and my left hand was resting on the napkin spread across my lap while I ate the *hors d’oeuvres* with my right hand. Suddenly, Rupert took my free hand by the wrist and looked at it as if it were an interesting plant he had found growing beside a cliff path.

‘I’m glad you haven’t taken to painting your nails. I can’t think why women do it.’

In fact my nails were painted with colourless varnish, but they were filed to the

length of my fingertips, partly because I had always had rather weak nails, and partly because I found long ones an impediment to needlework. Dina had strong flexible nails which she wore very long and vividly lacquered.

‘Who gave you this? A boy-friend?’ Rupert was looking at the small Victorian ring which I wore on my little finger. It reminded me of a forget-me-not, being composed of eight tiny blue stones surrounding a pearl.

‘Simon sent it for my birthday.’

‘I was sorry to hear about his mother. Do you see much of him nowadays?’

‘At irregular intervals.’ I freed my wrist from his clasp, afraid that he might notice the rapidity of my pulse.

‘I see your mother now and then. She didn’t tell me you were now a member of the Embroiderers’ Guild,’ he said. ‘Of course you were always keen on sewing, weren’t you? But aren’t you unusually young for that kind of accolade?’

‘The Guild isn’t exclusive,’ I explained. ‘Anyone can join. I belong in order to use their library, and to borrow portfolios of particular types of embroideries. This morning I went there to look at some of the books which are too large to go through the post.’

It was three o’clock before we finished lunch. He said, ‘Must you go to the museum?’

Couldn't you skip it and come for a walk in the park instead?'

We took a taxi to Marble Arch, and then we walked through Hyde Park recalling incidents from our childhood.

'How happy we were in those days. I wish one could turn back the clock,' he said, with a sigh.

Was it a cue? I was certain by then that he was deeply unhappy, but somehow I didn't want to hear about it. What good could it do, except to relieve his feelings? And why should I, of all people, be his confidante?

So I said, 'Talking of turning back, it's time I was heading for the station, Rupert.'

He insisted on escorting me there, and would not hear of going by Tube. In the taxi, he asked, 'Are you in London often?'

'Fairly often. About once in six weeks, I suppose.'

'Perhaps we can do this again.'

'Perhaps . . . '

Although I demurred, he paid off the cab and came with me into the station where he bought an evening paper for me, and asked, 'Will you be having tea on the train, or shall I get some chocs to keep you going?'

'Chocolates! After that colossal lunch? Honestly, Rupert!' I protested.

'Dee never travels without a box of chocolates, and she smokes like a chimney as well,' he said, pulling a face.

'Dina doesn't have to watch her figure, and on a long journey chocolates are rather a treat. But I shall be there in under an hour.'

As we strolled towards my platform, he said, 'Had you been staying overnight, we might have gone to a theatre.'

'When are you going home?'

'Tomorrow, probably,' he answered, with a slight shrug.

We had reached the barrier and I looked in my bag for the ticket. Then I gave Rupert my hand, and said, 'Thank you for a splendid lunch. Give my regards to Dina when she gets back from Paris – and my love to Father and Mother if you happen to see them in the next day or two. Goodbye, Rupert.'

He gripped my hand and stared at me in a silence prolonged to the point of becoming uncomfortable.

'Oh, God, what a damned fool I've been!' he burst out, at last.

He let go of my hand and hurried away.

For several days afterwards, my thought and emotions were in a whirl. I was haunted by Rupert's parting words, and worried that, if he did ask me to meet him again, I might not be

able to resist my reawakened longing for him. To have lunched with him once, after an accidental encounter, was one thing; to meet by design was a different matter. I had always disliked girls who became involved with other people's husbands, and despised the feeble excuses they made for themselves. Rupert and I had the unusually strong excuse that we had grown up together and were almost like brother and sister, but I knew I should despise myself for meeting him on that pretext, and that the happiness of being with him would be cancelled by the subsequent pricking of my conscience.

In fact it was almost three months before I heard from him again, by which time I was more or less restored to the emotional calm which our unexpected meeting had disturbed.

In the middle of December I received an invitation to lunch with him. The letter came from his club, and he wrote that Dina was Christmas shopping in Rome before meeting him in Switzerland on the twenty-third where they would be among the guests of a film producer and his actress wife who always celebrated Christmas with a large, lavish house-party in their ski-lodge near Grindelwald.

*I always feel a bit of a bumpkin among Dee's witty theatrical friends,* wrote Rupert, and went on to reminisce about our youthful Christmases at Carlou.



The fact that he wrote at such length was a measure of his loneliness. All morning I struggled against the temptation to telephone his club, as he suggested in the letter. At lunch-time I made myself write a nonchalant reply in which I said, quite untruthfully, that I was up to my eyebrows in Christmas preparations and could not possibly come to London at present. This I put in the afternoon post to reach him next morning, and to my relief that was the end of the incident.

As the Rector's wife was ill and soon would be bedridden, Miss Wallace had arranged for them to spend Christmas with her, although the Rector would be taking services and visiting sick parishioners. Miss Palgrave had also been invited and, knowing what a languid person she was, never lifting a finger as long as someone else was prepared to wait on her, I thought Miss Wallace would exhaust herself, cooking and washing up. So I asked if I could stay to help her, and have my parents as guests, which would be a nice rest for Mother.

'Yes, indeed - with pleasure,' said Miss Wallace, when I made this suggestion. 'But rather a dull time for you, stuck with four old fogeys and two middle-aged people. Why not ask the young man from the museum?'

She was referring to Laurence whom I had known for some time but whom she had first met the week before. On the several occasions when

he had been to the shop she had happened to be out.

Laurence worked behind the scenes at our nearest museum, and it was he who, when I wanted to see what thimbles they had in the reserves, had conducted me to a storeroom stacked high with dusty cardboard boxes containing the many objects there was not room to display in the public galleries.

He had stayed with me while I examined about two dozen thimbles made not only of silver and brass, but of mother-of-pearl, ivory, gold and hand-painted porcelain. We had little or no conversation, and I had come away with the impression of a pale, taciturn young man with beautiful hands and long but extremely clean nails.

The next time we had met was some weeks later when I heard someone enter the shop and went through, to find him holding a blue and white transfer-printed comport which had been part of the window display.

He gave me the briefest of glances when I said good afternoon, and by this time I had learnt enough about customers to guess that he wanted the comport but could not afford it. All the time he was looking round the shop, his gaze kept returning to it, and eventually he picked it up again.

‘Have you any other pieces like this?’ he asked me.

‘I’m afraid we haven’t at the moment, except for a badly damaged platter.’

‘Could I see it?’

‘If you like – but it’s an awful mess. It’s been riveted *and* badly glued. It’s hardly fit to be seen, although the design is interesting.’

I fetched the platter from the workroom and saw his face light with interest. ‘It’s the Spode Greek Pattern,’ he said, at once. ‘Look at the detail, and what a marvellous rich blue. How much is it?’

I was touched by his open enthusiasm. Most collectors tried to hide their eagerness, and most demanded perfection and would not consider a piece as badly damaged as this one. Indeed, the majority of our customers regarded Staffordshire blue earthenware as rubbishy nineteenth-century stuff, not to be compared with the eighteenth-century porcelain they collected.

I could have asked him for five shillings but, on impulse, I said, ‘You can have it if you think you can mend it.’

He came back the following week to show me the platter, now carefully and skilfully repaired so that although the cracks were still visible they were less offensive.

To my surprise, for I thought he had not recognised me as the girl who was interested in

thimbles, he then produced from his pocket two silver thimbles, one advertising Hovis bread and the other Andrews' Liver Salts.

'I thought these might interest you,' he said. 'A small return for your kindness in giving me the platter.'

So began our friendship. After he had spent Christmas with us, Laurence invited Miss Wallace and me to celebrate New Year with him. He lived in one all-purpose room at the top of a large, old house, and he had filled it with beautiful, interesting things all of which had been badly damaged. It did not bother him that a Hepplewhite chair had two of its original legs missing, or that a Derby figure of a flower girl had lost her right arm.

'The Venus di Milo has lost both arms, but she's still a great treasure,' was his point of view.

One Sunday Laurence was having lunch with us when Simon turned up. Because I liked them both, I expected them to like each other, but it soon became obvious that they were not on the same wavelength. Their antipathy was not overt on that occasion; it was merely that Laurence reverted to the taciturnity of my own first encounter with him, and Simon who could draw anyone out usually, indeed it was part of his profession, made no effort to be agreeable to him.

It was therefore unfortunate that the next time we saw Simon once again Laurence happened to be with us. The third time they encountered each other at our house, Laurence soon made an excuse to leave.

Simon said nothing until Miss Wallace was out of the room and he was alone with me. Then he said, 'You seem to be seeing a lot of Master Laurence.'

His tone was mild, and I answered equally casually, 'Yes, he comes here quite often. He's a fellow collector, and he hasn't been in this part of the world long, so I think he's a little lonely.'

'Does he take you out?'

'We've been to lectures together. I don't think he's very well paid, and most of his salary goes on the things he collects. He may seem dull, but he can be extremely interesting once one gets him going. Did you know that underglaze blues became much more brilliant after 1816? Before that the Napoleonic Wars prevented us from importing the best Saxon cobalt.'

'Riveting!' was Simon's comment.

It was unlike him to be caustic. I said, 'Why have you taken such a dislike to Laurence? He seems quite harmless to me.'

'Oh, agreed. There's not the least danger that if he invites you up to see his transfer ware

you'll find he has other ideas,' said Simon sardonically.

In a vague, unconsidered way I had realised from the outset that my friendship with Laurence was on a different plane from my relationship with Daniel Lovell, and it annoyed me that Simon considered it necessary to underline this fact.

'I'm not totally naïve, you know,' I told him crossly.

'No, only about eighty-five per cent.'

At which point Miss Wallace returned and we changed the subject.

Simon disapproved of Laurence, and I disapproved of the only one of his girl-friends I saw.

One day when I was going to London Miss Wallace asked me to deliver an antique silver alarm watch which she had had mended for him. At this time he was sub-renting a flat belonging to another journalist who was away in the States, and as I went up the stairs I heard his voice and a girl's voice on the landing above me. They were saying goodbye, and a few moments later she came down the stairs in great haste and I flattened against the wall to let her pass. She was pretty, and she left behind her a drift of delicious scent, but from my glimpse of her face, I did not take to her.

Simon had retreated into the flat when I reached the landing. He answered my knock with

the air of someone in a hurry. He thanked me for returning the watch, apologised for not asking me in, and explained that he had just received instructions to catch the first flight to Barcelona. Within two or three minutes of ascending the staircase, I was on my way down to the street.

Early in December I went to London again, by which time he had moved to another address. The chief purpose of this trip was to attend a day school at the Embroiderers' Guild, and again Miss Wallace had something for me to deliver to Simon. This time it was a present for his birthday, but whether he would be at home to receive it we did not know. Her gift was an addition to the bronze plaquettes he had shown us from time to time, and mine was a book for which I knew he had been hunting.

It was, I remembered, at about this time last year that I had received the note from Rupert. Since then I had heard nothing from him, and very little about him, as Mother's references to the Fontaines usually concerned Dina whose extravagant whims were a source of endless gossip on the island.

I enjoyed the Guild day schools as much for the contact with other embroiderers as for the instruction we received. When we stopped for lunch some members would rush away to the fabric department of John Lewis in Oxford Street to spend the whole lunch break revelling in the

wide choice of fabrics and trimmings. Others preferred to have coffee and sandwiches in the converted and colour-washed coal cellar which lay beneath the paving stones of Wimpole Street.

I usually had lunch in the cellar, and then I would browse in the book room where all the latest books on embroidery techniques, including specialised works not normally seen in book shops, were on sale.

The day school ended at four o'clock, and most of the other Guild members had to rush to catch trains to the provinces or, if they lived in the suburbs of London, they were anxious to avoid the rush hour on the Underground. Only one other person was in no hurry and we strolled down Wimpole Street together. She was staying in central London with her husband, and they had tickets for the show of the moment, she told me with anticipatory pleasure.

When we had parted and I was walking in the direction of Simon's flat, I could not help envying her her evening and feeling downcast at the prospect of my solitary one. There was nothing to prevent me from going to the theatre by myself, but even if the shows which appealed to me were not fully booked, I knew from experience that going out at night on one's own could be more depressing than staying in. During the daytime most people were by themselves, or



with companions of the same sex, and to be a girl of my age without a male escort was subtly uncomfortable.

The entrance to Simon's new flat was more imposing than I had expected. A porter in dark green livery was on duty in the lobby. He told me to turn to the right when I left the lift at the seventh floor.

The corridor into which I presently stepped was carpeted and furnished with well-tended plant troughs and expensively-shaded wall lamps. There were also two elegant vitrines which, when I looked at them more closely, proved to be showcases for pieces of modern porcelain and glass from a famous store.

Number 23 was at the extreme end of the corridor. I pressed the bell and waited, not expecting any result. But just as I was about to push the package through the letterbox, the door opened a little and Simon peered rather warily through the gap.

'Andelys!' He flung the door wide, revealing that all he was wearing was a towel wrapped round his lean hips.

Evidently I had caught him taking a shower. He had towelled his hair, but there were beads of water on his shoulders and a trickle running down his chest. He was as tanned as he always used to be at the end of the summer at Carlou when we were children; only now instead of him

being too thin for his height, his long bones were clad with muscle. His brown skin reminded me of the satin hide of a racehorse. When he moved one saw how beautiful the human body could be when there was no spare flesh to conceal the interplay of sinews.

‘Come in . . . come in,’ he said warmly. ‘What brings you to London? Are you both here?’

‘No, only me. I’ve been to a day school on quilting. I didn’t expect to find you in. We thought you were probably abroad again.’

‘I have been. I’m only just back. If you’d rung the bell half an hour ago, I shouldn’t have been here, and in half an hour’s time I shall be out having something to eat. Can you have dinner with me, or are you already bespoken?’

‘No – no, I’m not. I’d love to have dinner with you.’

By this time he had drawn me inside and closed the door. Within was a small vestibule leading to a spacious sitting-room with one wall entirely composed of sliding glass doors. Beyond them lay a paved roof garden, but before I had time to exclaim, or to notice any details, Simon said, ‘Come into the bedroom and we can talk while I dress. I think I could do with a shave as well as a shower’ – running a hand over his jaw.

He steered me into the bedroom, opened various drawers and cupboards and, when he

had found what he wanted, disappeared into an adjoining bathroom.

‘What time’s your last train?’ he called out. And added, before I could answer, ‘Pity I can’t drive you back and stay the night. But I’ve got an early meeting.’

‘I’m not going home tonight. I’m staying here to go to the Portobello tomorrow.’

‘Where are you staying?’

I told him.

‘Never heard of it.’

‘It’s not your sort of place. It’s full of old ladies and parsons.’

‘Will the doors be barred if I keep you out later than midnight?’

‘Yes. If anyone wants to be late, they have to ask for a key. I didn’t think I’d need one.’

‘What were your plans for this evening?’

‘I hadn’t made up my mind. Possibly a theatre.’

‘Alone?’

‘Yes.’

He came back into the bedroom and went to the suitcase which was lying open on the bed. He had put on trousers and shoes but was still without a shirt. As he bent over the case, searching for something among the neat layers of clothing, the whole of his back from broad shoulders to narrow waist rippled with muscle because of the movement of his arms.

He turned to me, frowning slightly. 'It's not much fun going to a show by yourself. Why couldn't Miss Wallace have come up with you? The antique business is supposed to be booming these days. Surely she can afford to shut up shop for a couple of days now and then?'

'It isn't a good plan to do that just when we feel like it. Dealers who've come a long way get annoyed when they find somewhere closed when it ought to be open. Anyway, Miss Wallace loathes London. She's too old to like hustle and bustle. The Bermondsey and the Portobello would exhaust her.'

Simon's face was still disapproving. But after a moment he shrugged and went back to the bathroom to plug in his electric razor. He could not hear me unless I shouted, so I sat in a comfortable chair and looked round his bedroom.

The carpet, curtains and wallpaper had the perfectly co-ordinated look which generally is achieved only by professional decorators. Apart from the chair and the bed, all the furniture was built-in. It was how I imagined the bedrooms in hotels like the Hilton, an impression heightened by the open suitcase. The only personal feature was a crowded array of books on a shelf which was part of the headboard of the wide double bed. I was scanning their titles when Simon reappeared, buttoning the cuffs of a clean shirt.

At the sight of me kneeling on the bed, he smiled slightly. 'I don't know that Miss Wallace would approve of your being in here. In her day it wasn't the thing to visit men's flats, and as for lounging on their beds - ' He shook his head in mock horror.

I laughed. 'If it were anyone else's bed I wouldn't *be* lounging on it. I'm not utterly clueless. May I use the bathroom if you've finished?'

There was a fraction of time - or perhaps I imagined it - in which his face had the blank look with which he always masked anger. Then he said, 'Yes, of course. Help yourself,' and turned away to the wardrobe to take out the coat of his suit.

When I emerged from the bathroom, the bedroom was empty, the suitcase unpacked and put away. Simon was in the sitting-room, a glass in each hand. One of them he handed to me.

'I'll ring for a taxi and we'll be off. I don't know about you, but I'm peckish. I haven't eaten since last night.' He picked up the telephone receiver, dialled a number and drank some of his gin and tonic.

I sipped mine and glanced round the room, which was very different from the bedroom. Here the basic décor was not the first thing one noticed. Indeed, when we left the flat shortly afterwards I had not registered the colours of the

carpet or curtains. Here what one felt was the impact of a personality. Books, paintings, objects – everywhere there were things which could never have been assembled by a decorator. Some of them I recognised. Others I had never seen before, or suspected him of possessing.

Before I had time to take in much, he was urging me to drain my glass.

‘Why no breakfast or lunch?’ I asked him, as the lift sank to ground level.

‘I did have some breakfast, actually. An egg and an orange. But I never eat meals in the air. I find if you cut out food you also cut out the worst effects of jet lag. Everyone in the West eats far too much anyway.’

I was not accustomed to gulping generous measures of gin. As he helped me into the cab I began to feel the slightly airborne sensation which strong liquor induces in people whose usual intake is a glass of wine.

My euphoria increased as the taxi whirled us through the West End. Half an hour ago I had been facing a solitary evening, and not looking forward to it. Now I was safely *à deux* with a personable and interesting man who could afford to wine and dine me in style, and in whose comfortable company my appetite would not be spoilt by what might, later, be expected of me.

He took me to a small, quiet restaurant where apricot-shaded lamps cast a flattering

glow on the faces of the women diners. I knew it was flattering because I could see our reflections in a large gilt looking-glass.

Often when a woman catches an unexpected glimpse of herself in public, she is shocked by her glum expression or ungraceful posture. But the girl I saw in the mirror seemed, at first glance, to be someone else. Could that smiling, quite striking-looking girl really be me? It was all a trick of the light, of course: the light bronzed my mouse-brown hair and lent a creamy tint to my winter-pale skin. Also, although the rest of my clothes were ordinary off-the-peg garments, my blouse would have cost twenty guineas had I bought it at the White House in Bond Street instead of spending twenty hours hand-stitching the pin-tucks. With my chain store shoes and three-guinea skirt hidden below the table, and only my blouse and antique earrings showing above it, I could pass for a rich man's daughter or a successful career girl.

'Yes, you're very attractive,' Simon remarked, in a teasing tone.

'*That* wasn't what I was thinking. I was just feeling pleased that I don't look too rustic. My idea of "attractive" is that gorgeous creature in the corner.'

He glanced at the blonde. 'I'm too old to be impressed by false eyelashes and half an inch of make-up.' His gaze shifted to the elderly man

who was with her. 'Or perhaps I'm too young,' he added dryly.

I remembered the girl I had seen coming out of his other flat. 'You didn't appear to object to heavy make-up six months ago.'

For some moments the allusion escaped him. And then I could see that he understood the reference, and I wondered why I had made it and wished I had held my tongue. But he wasn't annoyed. He looked amused. 'That's another example of someone making a greater impression on you than she did on me,' he said lightly. 'Now stop chattering and think about food.'

In the end, confused by the *embarrass de choix*, I made him choose for us both. It was a wonderful meal. We began with thin slices of Craster-cured kipper served with lemon and rye bread and dewy rolls of unsalted butter. Then we had eggs Florentine which, I discovered, were eggs baked in fluted ramekins, bedded on spinach and rich with cream under a crisp brown topping of cheese and crumbs. The main course was pigeon cooked with onion and grapes and brandy, and served with plain, fluffy rice. After which I felt sure I couldn't swallow another morsel. Then I tasted the snow-cold lime sorbet, which Simon had ordered, and it was so light and refreshing that ten minutes later I was ready for the Roquefort.



‘No wonder you don’t eat on aeroplanes if you eat like this on the ground,’ I said.

‘I don’t eat like this as a rule. Tonight is a special occasion.’

‘Oh, goodness me, yes – your birthday. And I, like a fool, have forgotten all about your presents.’ I delved in my bag for the packages. ‘That was the whole point of my coming to the flat. What a good thing you reminded me. Miss Wallace would have been so disappointed if I’d taken her present home again.’

‘Actually I wasn’t reminding you. I’d also forgotten about my birthday,’ Simon replied. ‘I assumed you had come to the flat for the pleasure of my company.’

‘There – with love from Miss Wallace,’ I said, placing her package on the table.

Naturally he was delighted with it. When he had admired it I produced my present. He opened it and looked at it in silence; then, to my surprise, he took one of my hands and kissed the back of it.

‘Thank you.’

The gesture alone was one of casual affection, but it was accompanied by a look which started a sudden fluttering in the pit of my stomach. This was not something unfamiliar. I had felt it long ago with Rupert. But it was oddly disconcerting to experience the feeling with Simon, and even more peculiar that he had

looked at me in a way to cause such a reaction. Then I remembered that he had drunk a good deal of wine with the meal and that while his head was doubtless much stronger than mine, and he was perfectly sober in a general sense, he had probably had enough to put him in an amorous mood had he been with any girl but me. Perhaps he was so accustomed to giving girls that long promising look at this stage of the evening that he had for a moment forgotten that tonight it was only Andelys on the opposite side of the table.

‘What time is it?’ I asked.

He turned back his cuff to see his watch. ‘Not ten o’clock yet. Let’s go back to the flat, shall we? I’ve got a small present for you.’

We walked back. It was not far, and the night was both dry and mild. Once or twice we paused to look in a shop window and discuss the wares displayed. We talked all the way. With Simon it had never been an effort to keep a conversation going, nor difficult to stop talking when we both preferred to fall silent. In that respect our moods had always matched perfectly.

At the flat Simon made coffee while I wandered about admiring his possessions.

‘Have you bought all these things since you moved? You must be earning a fortune,’ I

remarked, when he carried a tray from the kitchen.

‘Good lord, no. Most of this stuff has been in store. There wasn’t room for it in my last place. I bought that chair in a junk shop in Bristol when I was doing my stint on the *Western Daily Press*.’ He indicated a beautiful Regency chair with reeded side rails, sabre legs and a lyre back. ‘It cost me a fiver. Not that I could afford a fiver in those days, but I liked it and it seemed a good investment.’

‘Where did this come from?’ I asked, touching a bronze bacchante on a marble plinth.

‘From France. I’ve always liked bronzes. That little fellow’ – pointing to a fat sleeping baby – ‘is probably after du Quesnoy. He specialised in terracotta models of babies and they’ve been copied in all kinds of materials. But I’ve never seen any more of the bronze copies at prices I could afford.’

At last, when I had looked at nearly everything, I said, ‘I think your bedroom is rather soulless, but this is a lovely room, Simon. How I wish it were mine. And in summer what *luxe* to have a roof garden.’

‘Mm, it helps to make city life bearable. Come and have coffee.’ He sat down at one end of the sofa and began to fill the cups.

When I sat down at the other end he tossed something on to my lap. It was an acorn made of

ivory. When I unscrewed the beautifully turned acorn cup, out fell a thimble, a gold one. Round the rim, in tiny letters, was engraved – *Gage de mon amitié.*

‘Oh, Simon, it’s absolute heaven! Where did you find it?’

‘It was in a junk shop in Belgium. I thought it might appeal to you.’

‘Appeal – what an understatement! I love it. How can I thank you?’

‘A kiss would be nice,’ he said lightly, and he moved along the sofa, close to me, and offered his cheek.

I had forgotten by then the look he had given me in the restaurant. Relaxed by my interest in his possessions, and enchanted by the golden thimble, I kissed him without hesitation. But as my lips brushed his jaw he turned his mouth to meet mine, and suddenly we were no longer childhood friends but a man and a girl alone in a flat late at night, with Perry Como on the record player, and a bronze satyr carrying off a naked and not unwilling nymph on the coffee table, and Simon’s arm snaking along the cushions behind me. It was like finding a time-bomb. Somehow I stifled my panic and tried to think of a way to defuse the situation.

‘I really must go soon. Would you telephone for a taxi for me?’ Trying to sound calm, I straightened and reached for the coffee.

To my relief he made no move to pull me back into his arms, but I did not care for the undertone of amusement with which he said, 'If the worst comes to the worst and you're locked out of your hotel, I have a spare bed you can use.'

I began to feel angry as well as flustered. 'You know very well I can't stay here.'

'I don't see why not. As you said yourself, earlier this evening, "If it were anyone else's bed . . . "'

'Spending the night here would be different. Apart from other considerations, supposing there was an emergency and Miss Wallace tried to telephone me?'

'Not very likely, do you think?'

I had gulped about half the hot coffee. The rest I decided to leave. I put the cup back on the table and prepared to stand up.

Simon, who had not yet touched his coffee, caught me gently by the wrist and prevented me from rising.

'Please, Simon, don't start to spoil an enjoyable evening- '

'That's what I wanted to talk about. If I hadn't happened to be at home, would it have been enjoyable? How much longer are you going to waste your life, Andelys? A girl of your age, with your looks, should be dining out all the time. Not once in a blue moon, as you do. If you

go on like this, you're going to end up a lonely and bitter old maid.'

'Miss Wallace isn't lonely or bitter.'

'Miss Wallace's fiancé was killed, and so were all the other men she might have married. Her generation of women had spinsterhood forced on them. If you die a virgin it will be nobody's fault but your own.'

'I'm twenty-two, Simon, not thirty-two. There's still *some* hope for me, I think.'

'Not if you never go out with anyone. Not while you're still pining for Rupert. He's married to Dina. He's been married to her for three years. It's time you accepted that fact.'

'I could . . . if I knew he was happy,' I said, in a low voice. 'But he isn't. He's miserable with her.'

'You see him?' Simon asked sharply.

'I met him once, here in London. We had lunch together. It's the only time I've been alone with him.'

'Yes, I expect he is miserable with her,' he said unsympathetically. 'But that's no reason for you to make a hash of your life. I know you've been out with one or two men from time to time, but did you honestly give them a chance to get through to you? Or did you keep them at arm's length, and drop them the moment they showed any signs of wanting a cosier relationship?'

‘Oh, shut up, Simon,’ I said childishly. ‘You have no right to start badgering me. I don’t try to tell you how to live. It’s all a matter of temperament. You’re content with casual affairs, and I want something much deeper. I don’t want to be kissed by every Tom, Dick and Harry.’

I shook off his hand and jumped up. Half way towards the chair where I had left my coat, Simon caught me and took me roughly in his arms.

‘I think you’re afraid,’ he accused. ‘You’re afraid to let anyone make love to you because if you did you might find yourself enjoying it. You might even find yourself in love again, and because you were let down the last time, you’ve lost your nerve. You’d rather stay in a dream world with Rupert, damn him!’

I struggled to get away, but it was useless. He was much too strong for me.

‘No, Simon – please, don’t,’ I pleaded.

But pleading was as futile as struggling. In the end all I could do was to close my eyes and clench my teeth. Let him kiss me – let him try. The one thing he could never do was to force a response from me.

But that was the point at which Simon stopped using force. Softly and warmly his lips brushed my temples and eyelids, then my cheeks, the lobes of my ears, my neck, the hollow of my throat. Compared with the few

boisterous tussles in cars which were all my experience of lovemaking, this was as gentle and soothing as being stroked with pussy willow. Presently I discovered that what seemed soothing at first became exciting and tantalising when his lips kept coming close to my mouth but never quite touching it. When at last he did kiss me, it was like drowning in bliss. I slid my arms round his neck and wanted it never to end.

It ended when the telephone rang. We were back on the sofa by then, and I was considerably dishevelled and Simon was kissing my bare shoulder. At first he ignored the shrill noise, but when it persisted he groaned and reached for the receiver.

The telephone was on the table at the other end of the sofa. I believe had it been at our end, where he would have been able to reach it with one arm still round me, the spell on me might not have broken. But he had to release me completely and, in that respite from his arms, I came to my senses; or, to put it more accurately, I regained my mental faculties and realised how close to disaster my senses had brought me.

By the time he replaced the receiver, I was on my feet with my coat on, my bag in my hand, and my eyes on the clock on the bookcase.

‘It’s a quarter past twelve. Will you get me a taxi, or must I walk back?’



He stared at me blankly for a moment. His tie was adrift, his black hair was rumpled, and he looked oddly haggard. Then he straightened his shoulders and raked his fingers through his hair. 'I'll drive you there. I've got to catch the milk plane to Delhi.' And he disappeared into the bedroom, and I heard drawers opening and shutting and knew that he was re-packing his suitcase.

His car was garaged in the basement. On the way down he stopped off at the ground floor to speak to the night porter. But he did not speak to me, or I to him, as we drove to my hotel. Although it was half past twelve when we arrived there, for some reason the hall was still alight and the outer door open.

As I hurried up the steps, Simon caught me by the sleeve. 'Andelys, please . . . wait a minute.'

I stopped and shook off his hand. Unforgivably, I said, 'I hope your plane crashes. I hope I never see you again.'

Almost at once I regretted that bitter valediction, but almost at once was too late. By then all I could see of Simon was the crimson glow of his brake lights as his car reached the end of the street and turned out of sight.

It was nearly nine when I woke up the following morning. I hadn't slept till after four. For a few

moments I didn't remember what had happened, and then an undefined sense of disaster oppressed me, and finally the whole wretched business came back into clear, detailed focus.

But for the exigencies of Simon's job, it would not be this bed, but his bed, in which I should have woken. Yet, ashamed as I was of the ease with which I had succumbed, it was not my weakness which hurt most. The loss of our friendship was the worst thing. He had been in my life since for ever, and now we could never meet again without embarrassment. I had trusted him, and respected him; and he, knowing my inexperience, had deliberately tried to seduce me. It was unbelievable, like a nightmare.

But it hadn't been merely a nightmare. When I crawled out of bed and went to the basin to wash, there on my arms were the bruises left by his fingers and, on my neck, the darker imprint of his lips.

I didn't bother with breakfast but paid the hotel bill and went straight to the Portobello. I had never felt less like rummaging among the junk stalls, but if I went home empty-handed Miss Wallace would want to know why, and I had enough to hide from her without having to fabricate an excuse for missing the market.

By midday I had found several things which would please our best private customers. A box

the size of a shilling containing three tiny carved mice would be sure to appeal to Mrs Dunlop with her passion for everything miniature. Old Mr Neville, our treen collector, would almost certainly want to add the wooden gingerbread mould to his extensive collection; and for Mr Field, who collected portrait busts, I bought a small biscuit bust of Elizabeth Fry, the prison reformer, wearing a starched cap and tucker. On my own behalf, I sold several discards from my collection of needlework tools to recoup the high price of a tambour hook which I had bought for myself a fortnight before. But none of these dealings gave me the pleasure they usually did.

It was during the homeward train journey that I remembered the thimble Simon had given me. Where was it now? What had I done with it?

I couldn't find it in my bag, nor could I remember putting it there. Reluctantly, I thought back to the moment when Simon had tossed the acorn on to my lap. It was fortunate I had the compartment to myself because, when I remembered kissing his cheek and what had followed, a great shudder went through me, like an ague. Instead of concentrating on the thimble, I couldn't stop myself re-living all the other kisses. If only it had been Rupert with whom I had shared those rapturous moments on the sofa. For it had been rapturous: that I couldn't deny. Simon made love superbly, far

better than Rupert when he had kissed me in the woods that last summer before Dina came back. But Rupert had been a green boy, and Simon was a man of the world. Although he was discreet about his women friends, I had always suspected that his private life was far from celibate. Last night had confirmed my suspicions. Only a man with a great deal of experience could have overcome my resistance as swiftly and skilfully as he had. Perhaps one couldn't blame him for being practised. Judging by remarks I had overheard – *Did you see Simon Herault last night? Isn't he gorgeous? You wouldn't call him good-looking, but I think he's terribly attractive. I never much liked Panorama until he was on it. He makes even politics interesting.* – there was something about him which appealed to a wide cross-section of the female public. No doubt a lot of women practically threw themselves at him; and, as he was young and virile and unattached, it would have been surprising if he had *not* made the most of his opportunities.

But to try to add me to his conquests, that I could neither understand nor forgive. It was a despicable action, and to pretend that he was doing it for my benefit, to help me to overcome a neurotic fear of being hurt again, was even more contemptible.

In the days that followed I was almost as unhappy as I had been when I first came to England. I couldn't sleep, and I had to force myself to eat, and to appear cheerful and normal.

In February we had a windfall.

It happened because of my wish to protect the smallest and most fragile pieces in my growing collection of antique needlework tools from dust and damage without hiding them away in the drawers of a collector's cabinet. As Alfred was quite a good handyman if one caught him at the right moment, which was to say before opening time, Miss Wallace suggested that I should ask him to make a shallow box and hinge it to the back of a picture frame. This, lined with a piece of old velvet, and fitted with strips of glass supported by map pins, would make an ideal display case for such things as carved cotton barrels and cowrie shell tape measures.

The first thing was to find a suitable frame and there were plenty to choose from in the outhouse. I found one of bird's eye maple containing a badly foxed chromolithograph of a landscape in central Europe. When I cut through the dirty, brittle paper sealing the back of the picture, and extracted the rusty pins which had held the backing board in place, I discovered a

number of pictures concealed behind the chromolithograph.

There was a steel engraving of a girl called Euphemia Murray, also known as 'The Flower of Strathmore', two very bad watercolours which looked like the work of some Victorian miss with no artistic talent but nothing better to do with her time, and a pen and wash drawing which I liked and thought I might hang in my room.

When I showed it to Miss Wallace, she surprised me by giving a little gasp, and then shaking her head and saying firmly, 'No, no - it must be a copy.'

'A copy of what?'

'It's in the style of Rowlandson.'

'You mean Thomas Rowlandson?'

Only a few days before an elderly dealer had been telling me the story of a collector who, for one pound, had bought Rowlandson's *The Vauxhall Gardens*, a painting thought to have been lost for ever because it had not been seen in public since the Royal Academy exhibition of 1784. Following its discovery, Christie's had sold it at auction for nearly three thousand pounds, which at that time, in 1945, had been a great deal of money. But, as the dealer had emphasised, such treasures were seldom snapped up for a song by casual buyers. And to illustrate that beauty, antiquity and rarity were not always easy to recognise, he showed me a

fine celadon vase which, had I seen it on the white elephant stall at a jumble sale, I should have taken for a pot for pipe-cleaners and dated circa 1935.

Although she felt sure it must be a fake, Miss Wallace agreed that the drawing should be taken to Sotheby's for an expert opinion. The upshot was that, three months later, our Rowlandson was bought by Colnaghi's, the great London art dealers. It was a much less important picture than *The Vauxhall Gardens* and it did not fetch as high a price. But after Miss Wallace had given a large donation to her friend, the Rector, in gratitude for our good fortune, there was still enough money left to have the outside of the house painted, and to buy a small car.

It was Simon who had convinced her that a car would make life much easier for us, and indeed would become a necessity should anything happen to deprive us of Alfred's assistance.

'I wish Simon were here to advise us. I don't altogether trust motor car salesmen,' said Miss Wallace.

It was a remark which, had I still been on terms with him, I should have included in my next letter to Simon, knowing it would amuse him. But a Christmas card from India had been his only communication since the night at his flat, and I could not imagine ever writing to him

again. But habits of mind are hard to shed, and my habit of sharing certain kinds of jokes with Simon would sometimes catch me unaware in the way that reformed nicotine addicts said they occasionally felt a fleeting desire for a cigarette months, even years, after giving up smoking.

Then we had another piece of luck. We heard of a retired headmistress who was selling her car because her eyesight was failing. As she was known never to have exceeded forty-five m.p.h. and to have kept the coachwork as immaculate as her furniture, we bought the car with no fear that its good appearance might later prove to have been deceptive.

I had always wanted to learn to drive, and I soon passed the test and the pair of us took to the road. Every fine Sunday afternoon and early closing day we drove to places which had been out of reach by bus. Berkshire, Wiltshire and Dorset, even Somerset, were now accessible to us.

Spring came early that year, and one morning Miss Wallace said, 'Do you think you would find driving on the Continent difficult, Andelys?'

'On the right instead of the left? No, I shouldn't think so.'

'I was wondering if it might be a good plan to take a short holiday in France. I was reading Ronsard in bed last night, and it reminded me



that there are two places I've always wanted to see but never have. Carcassonne is too far south for us, but Chenonceaux is quite near. All my life I've wanted to see the chateau at Chenonceaux. I don't feel my age, but I can't *count* on being here next year. Shall we take advantage of this lovely weather and go at once? Tomorrow morning?'

Her casual reference to death chilled me. I had lost Rupert, my true love, and I had lost Simon, who had been almost a brother to me. I didn't want even to think about losing Miss Wallace.

We set out for France the following morning, and just before we left we received an airmail letter from Berlin where Simon was stopping off on his way back from India. He wrote that it would not be long before he returned to London, and as soon as he could he would come to see us.

'How pleasant it will be to see him again,' said Miss Wallace happily. 'We haven't heard much from him lately.'

'No, we haven't,' I agreed, my pleasure in the jaunt to France now clouded by apprehension at the thought of Simon's imminent homecoming.

We crossed the Channel from Newhaven, and reached Rouen in time to spend an hour in the Henry le Secq des Tournelles Museum where

there was an unrivalled collection of Berlin jewellery. During the Napoleonic Wars, this delicate black iron jewellery had replaced the conventional jewels which the patriotic Prussian ladies had given to help the war effort. The collection was as interesting to me as to Miss Wallace, for as well as bracelets and earrings as fine and intricate as lace, it included a number of chatelaines fitted with sewing necessities.

Not wishing to sleep in the city, we continued south towards Alençon until we came to a small country town with a promising-looking hotel.

I slept badly that first night in France, not because of the delicious, rich, late dinner we had eaten at the end of our journey, but from dread of Simon's threatened visit.

My next night in France was even more restless, but by then the news from home had driven all thought of Simon out of my head. More than once, during that interminable second night abroad, I switched on the bedside lamp and re-read the newspaper report with the heading - ISLAND PARTY ENDS IN TRAGEDY - *Hostess Falls To Death*.

And about three o'clock in the morning, as I sat up in bed staring at the photograph of Dina, it came into my head that perhaps it had not been an accident. Perhaps Rupert had killed her.

I left Miss Wallace having coffee in the lounge of the Hotel Bordeaux in the Place de la Gare in Tours. I wasn't happy about deserting her, but she pooh-poohed my misgivings.

'Nonsensical child! It is I who should be worried about you. There's certainly no need to add me to *your* anxieties,' she said, before she kissed me goodbye.

'Promise that if anything goes wrong - if you should sprain an ankle or feel ill - you'll wire me at once?'

'Very well, I promise. But I fancy the only ill-effects I am likely to experience will be the result of my own over-indulgence,' she said. 'Take care of yourself, Andelys. Give my regards to your parents.'

It was about two hundred miles from Tours to St Malo, where I had to leave the car because there was no ferry for vehicles from France to the islands. I arrived in Jersey too late for the boat to Guernsey, and I couldn't get there by air because a thick sea mist had closed Guernsey airport.

So I had to stay at a boarding house where again I spent a wretched night trying to convince myself that Rupert was incapable of killing anyone, and certainly not his wife. Had it been high summer a likely explanation of the accident would have been that after the party Dina had

decided on a moonlight bathe and, being a little tipsy, had lost her balance on one of the trickier cliff paths. Carlou had several bays which visitors were warned to avoid if they were not agile and had a poor head for heights. Even chamois-footed Dina might slip on such paths after too many champagne cocktails. But it was not high summer, so moonlight bathing was not a feasible explanation, and even moonlight strolling seemed unlikely.

Something else which puzzled me was a remark made by Miss Wallace yesterday.

*You want to go to him, don't you?*

How had she known I loved Rupert? I had never talked of him, except in the most casual way. I could only assume that my mother must have said something, although it wasn't like Mother to give away other people's secrets.

By morning the mist shrouding Guernsey had cleared, and I landed with several hours to spare before the boat left for Carlou. By now, however, my impatience had reached fever-pitch, and I directed the taxi-driver to take me to a part of the harbour where the smaller boats from Carlou berthed.

As I had hoped there was a boat there, the *Sans Souci*, which belonged to old Thomas Grison. But of Thomas himself there was no sign, so I settled myself on a bollard to await his return from whatever errand had brought him to

the town. Even if I had to wait an hour, I should still reach Carlou much sooner than by the afternoon ferry.

In fact it was only twenty minutes before I saw Thomas approaching, a stumpy figure I would have recognised anywhere. I jumped up and hurried to meet him, too impatient to observe the formalities. 'Can I come with you instead of waiting for the ferry?'

To my astonishment, he shook his head and brushed past me. 'Sorry, miss. I'm not licensed to carry passengers.'

I hurried along beside him. 'But you don't need a licence for me.' Suddenly I realised that, with sunglasses hiding my sleepless-night eyes, Thomas had not recognised me.

When I whipped them off, he exclaimed, 'Suffering cats, if it isn't young Anny Brelade! I took you for one of those pestering reporters from London. We've had them buzzing like horse-flies ever since it happened.'

I waited until we had cleared the harbour before I asked, 'What *did* happen, Mr Gison? I was in France when I heard, and I don't know any details at all.'

'I can tell you nothing,' he answered. 'There're plenty of rumours flying about, but no one knows for a fact what happened that night. Not that I'd be surprised if the rumours were true. She led him a dance, that we do know.' He

pursed his lips and shook his head. 'The Admiral must be turning in his grave.'

'What are the rumours?' Suddenly I felt cold to the bone.

He did not reply for so long that I thought he was ignoring my question. But at last he said heavily, 'That Sir Rupert killed her. That she drove him to it. She was like her mother, they say. I don't remember the French girl - I was still in the Merchant Navy when young Rozel brought her home with him, and of course I was away all the war. I only know what happened later from hearsay. It was a bad business, but at least no one knew much about it outside the island. This time it's in all the papers, and they're even flying over in helicopters to photograph where she fell.'

I remembered the helicopter in which Dina had arrived at Rupert's birthday ball, and the sensation she had caused among his guests with her exotic looks, her dress of curry-coloured chiffon, and her strange Eastern ornaments.

For the rest of the crossing we were silent. I don't know what Thomas Grison was thinking, but my mind was frozen with horror at the thought of Rupert in prison. He would never be able to bear it. He had no intellectual resources to help him endure a long sentence. All his interests and pleasures were physical. To be kept indoors by rough weather was as much confinement as he could stand; to be locked in a

cell with men who were habitual criminals, to have to wear prison clothes, to eat institutional food and put up with crude sanitary arrangements would be unendurable for him.

I had brought with me only a small, soft-topped overnight case which Mr Grison handed to me when I had scrambled up the metal staves driven into the wall of the jetty at Carlou. I thanked him, and started up the hill, debating whether to go directly to Le Manoir or to announce my arrival to my parents before I went to Rupert.

In the end I decided to go home first. I had had no breakfast, and needed some food and perhaps a hot bath as well to pull me together.

Greatly to my relief I met no one I knew, for it was the time of day when the children were in school, the men at work, the women busy in their kitchens. The only people I passed were a white-haired couple, plainly on holiday. They smiled and bade me good day in north country voices, and I nodded to them and wondered if what had occurred had cast a cloud on their visit, or given it a fillip. Probably, from an outsider's point of view, to find oneself at the scene of a major scandal was quite exciting.

I found my mother making pastry. The kitchen was full of the homely fragrance of new bread.

‘I knew you would come if you could,’ she said, after she had kissed me. ‘But we thought you might not hear anything until you came back from your holiday.’

‘It was only by chance that we did hear.’ I explained about the newspaper report and about Miss Wallace.

‘What a valiant old soul,’ Mother said warmly. ‘I wonder what shapes our natures and makes some people like her, and others like Claudine – quite worthless.’

‘Goodness knows.’ I helped myself to a bread roll still hot from the oven, sliced it in two and went to the pantry for the butter crock. On the way I passed the kitchen window and, looking out, saw two men approaching the house. One was my father. The other was Simon.

‘What’s he doing here?’ I asked sharply.

‘Who?’ Mother came to look over my shoulder. ‘Oh, Simon – he arrived last night. He’s here to cope with the Press. It’s going to be a bad business, Andelys. Everything is bound to come out, and the gutter press will have a field day. Simon can handle these people much better than Rupert.’

I wondered what she would say if I told her that, the last time we met, Simon had tried to seduce me.

It had not occurred to me that he too would come to Carlou at this time. If I had thought



about it, I would have expected that his reaction to the situation would be to shrug his shoulders and dismiss it as none of his business.

‘Perhaps if Claudine had married someone like Simon she wouldn’t have gone off the rails,’ Mother said sadly. ‘I daresay he could have managed her.’

I didn’t answer. I was bracing myself for the moment when he and my father would reach the house and somehow I would have to behave as if the episode at his flat had never happened.

Mother disappeared into the pantry and brought out the earthenware crock and a pot of her raspberry jam. ‘Here you are, dear. I’ll make some coffee.’

The fact that my father preceded him into the kitchen did a little to ease the ordeal of meeting Simon.

‘Anny!’ Father exclaimed, his worried expression lightening a little at the sight of me.

I went into his outstretched arms. ‘Hello, Dad – how are you?’

He hugged me close for a minute, and over his shoulder I met the inscrutable grey eyes of the man who, four months ago, had also held me in his arms.

## PART THREE

1963 - 1965

Father stepped back to look at me. 'It's good to see you, Anny, even if it's a bad business which brings you here. Simon tells us it's some time since he saw you.'

'Hello, Andelys.'

As my father released me, Simon held out his hand, and I had no choice but to take it. But I could not bring myself to smile at him.

'We thought it would be some time before you heard the news,' he said. 'Was the story in the French press?'

I shook my head and explained, addressing myself to Father, uncomfortably aware of Simon's eyes on my face. Was he really as cool as he appeared? Did he feel no twinge of discomfiture?

Apparently not, for the next thing he said was, 'Those rolls smell good, Mrs Brelade. May I have one?'

'I didn't make them to be looked at, dear.'

Mother gave him a plate from the dresser, a knife and a large gingham napkin. 'What about you, Remy?'

‘Not just now, my dear. I’ve things to do. I’ll see you at lunch, Anny.’ He patted my cheek, gave Simon a slap on the shoulder and disappeared into the passage.

His departure was followed by a silence. Mother was busy making coffee. Simon was helping himself to jam, and I was chewing my roll and trying to ignore the sensations induced by sitting within a few feet of him.

‘What did you mean when you said everything is bound to come out and the gutter press will have a field day?’ I asked Mother, as she put out three pottery mugs.

She glanced at Simon. ‘You tell her.’

‘According to gossip Dina had taken advantage of Rupert’s absence to throw a pretty wild party. She’s also alleged to have been carrying on with an artist who came here some months ago; and the word is that she was drinking heavily. How much of the gossip is true will emerge at the inquest, no doubt. It seems highly probable that the gutter press will make a big thing of it. Unless a bigger and juicier scandal breaks in the meantime,’ he added cynically.

I turned to Mother. ‘Did Rupert know all this?’

It was Simon who answered me. ‘If he didn’t before, he does now. The night it happened he was supposed to be in Denmark at a conservation symposium. But he hadn’t felt well,

and had decided to come back a day early. There was a hold-up at Jersey airport which made him miss the Carlou ferry, and he spent the night in town. The Guernsey police knew he was there because a senior police officer spoke to Rupert in the O.G.H. bar during the evening. When, later that night, the police had an urgent call from Constable Ozanne to say there had been an accident, possibly a murder, at Le Manoir, they hauled Rupert out of bed and brought him over in the police launch.'

'So he had an impeccable alibi? There was never any question that he might have killed her?'

'No - no, none at all,' exclaimed Mother. 'What made you think such a thing?'

'I came over with old Mr Grison, and he said it was one of the rumours.'

'Oh, the rumours!' She pantomimed fending off a swarm of insects.

I must have looked rather white - I certainly felt it - because she fetched a bottle of cognac from the pantry, and said, 'Have some brandy with your coffee. What about you, Simon?'

He thanked her. I knew he was watching me, but now I didn't mind his scrutiny. I was overwhelmed with relief that Rupert had had nothing to do with Dina's death, and had not even been here when it happened.

'Who called in Constable Ozanne?' I asked.

‘Moirá Baines, the child’s nurse,’ said Simon. ‘But not because of the accident. One of the men in the party tried to make her join the festivities, and she became frightened. So frightened that she bundled the boy in a blanket and fled to the nearest safe place – the Picots’ house. From what she told them, they decided to pass the buck to Ozanne. He arrived at Le Manoir minutes after the accident, when the guests were standing around looking stunned – those who were capable of standing. Quite a few had already passed out.’

‘You mean the accident happened at the house? The paper said “fell to her death” and I thought that must mean from the cliffs.’

‘No, she fell from the roof,’ he answered sombrely. ‘Do you remember, years ago, we all went up there and Dina pranced along the parapet? I suppose this time she’d had too much drink, and it was dark, and she lost her footing.’

My mother shuddered. ‘Only twenty-three. What an end!’

‘But a quick one, and less taxing for Rupert than her gradual decline into alcoholism or worse,’ Simon said, matter-of-factly.

I drank some cognac and jerked my mind away from a vision of Dina sprawled on the flagstones, dead. No doubt they would have covered her over before Rupert’s arrival; but they would not have moved her body until the

police surgeon had examined it. Now, for Rupert, the terrace would forever be haunted by a motionless shape under a sheet.

I said, 'How is he taking it? Have you seen him?'

'Oh, yes,' said Mother. 'He was with the police all that day, and then he came here and told us what had happened. He spent the night with us. Outwardly, he's taking it very calmly. But I think he's dazed rather than calm. It's the inquest which worries me. If it comes out that Claudine was involved with that wretched artist - ' She finished the sentence with a gesture.

'Yes, the inquest is bound to be tough on him,' Simon agreed.

'Where is he now? At Le Manoir?'

'No, Simon thought it would be better if Rupert stayed here until the Press have lost interest.'

'It's much easier for reporters and photographers to sneak up on him at Le Manoir,' Simon explained. 'It's within his seignory powers to ban them from coming ashore, and this he's done, but he can't stop them landing illicitly and trying to catch him unawares. We've already caught three in the grounds, but they won't think to look for him here.'

'Do you mean he's in the house now?'

'No, today he's gone out with George Cabot. He can't stay indoors all the time, and the

press aren't likely to be keeping watch on every fishing boat.'

'Where are Peter and the nurse?'

'They're staying with us, too,' said my mother. 'I don't know how we should have managed had it been the high season. Fortunately - as it turns out - the bookings for this month have been unusually slack. I've one couple arriving on Saturday, and a family of four the following weekend. Otherwise we're empty until Whitsun.'

She filled our mugs and added, 'As if Rupert hasn't enough troubles, Miss Baines has announced that she's leaving immediately after the inquest. Apart from the fright she experienced the other night, she doesn't care for the island. I can't say I blame her on that score. There's nothing for a city girl to do when she's off duty, and very few suitable young men.'

'Surely she could have hung on till all this is over. When is the inquest being held, or isn't it fixed yet?'

'It's being held the day after tomorrow,' said Simon.

'You look dreadfully tired, Anny dear. Why not have a nice bath?' suggested Mother.

It was from her, I realised, that I had inherited the idea of a bath being the best of pick-me-ups. 'Yes, I will when I've finished this coffee.'

Simon rose and picked up my small case. 'I'll run this up to your room.'

'Please don't bother. It isn't heavy.'

'It's no bother.'

'Thank heaven for Simon: the rock on whom one can always depend,' said Mother fondly, when he had left us.

'Not always,' I muttered.

She gave me a puzzled look. 'I've never heard of him letting anyone down.'

I had regretted my comment as soon as it was uttered, and I endeavoured to retrieve it by saying lightly, 'No, I daresay he hasn't. But he isn't the Archangel Gabriel incarnate, which is how you sometimes seem to regard him.'

The family bathroom was near the head of the staircase, and while I was lying in the water with my head on the suction-pillow I had given Mother for Christmas, the telephone rang in the hall and was answered by Simon. I could not hear his conversation, only the sound of his voice. If his presence would spare Rupert some of the miseries of his situation, I had to be glad Simon had come; but from a personal point of view having him around was a strain I could have done without. Merely listening to his voice revived feelings I wanted to forget.

In my bedroom, as I brushed my hair, the bed with its rose-sprigged eiderdown was temptingly reflected in the mirror. I decided to



cat-nap for half an hour before lunch. Although Rupert had far too much on his mind to notice the shadows under my eyes, I didn't want to meet him looking too ghastly. When I had set the alarm clock for half past twelve, it was bliss to slide under the eiderdown and let myself go limp all over.

It was not the alarm but the drone of an aircraft which woke me. For a while I lay cocooned in warmth, postponing the moment when I must bestir myself and dress for lunch. Presently there was a tap on the door.

'Come in.'

I expected to see Mother, but it was Simon who entered, carrying one of the round, heat-proof Taiwanese trays on which morning tea was served to guests who wished for it.

Expecting Mother, I had begun to sit up. At the sight of Simon I clutched the eiderdown to me, for it was my only covering. I had not bothered to put on a nightdress for my nap.

'Feeling better?' he asked.

'Yes, thanks,' I said, thinking *Really, Mother, did you have to send him up?*

But I couldn't blame her for my embarrassment. Unless I told her what had happened, she would go on regarding him as dear, reliable Simon who was like a big brother to me.

The bedside table was cluttered with bits and pieces and, propped on one elbow, I couldn't clear a place for the tray without risking revealing my nudity. But Simon was able to balance the tray on one hand while clearing a space with the other. Tea before lunch? How odd. Suddenly I noticed the time. I had been asleep for hours.

'Good heavens, it's gone five o'clock. I only meant to have a nap. Why on earth didn't somebody wake me?'

'What for? You were obviously whacked.' To my dismay, he sat down on the edge of the bed and began to pour out the milk.

'I'm sure you must have lots to do. Don't let me keep you,' I said stiffly.

'At the moment I've nothing to do, and I want to talk to you.'

'But I don't want to talk to you, Simon. In fact I feel the less said between us the better.' Becoming physically cramped and feeling at a tactical disadvantage in my present half-lying position, I attempted to sit up properly, not realising the edge of the eiderdown was pinned under Simon. When I moved, it stayed put.

He was busy with the teapot, but out of the corner of his eye he must have registered my hasty wriggle under the cover, for he said, 'Why didn't you say you were starkers? Where's your dressing gown?'

‘On the back of the door.’

Simon got up to fetch it and tossed it to me. Then he turned his back. ‘Tell me when you’re decent.’

I slid my arms into the sleeves and pulled the robe round me. It was an azure blue silk kimono patterned with cream and pink butterflies. Someone had given it to Miss Wallace before I was born, and as she never wore it and I had fallen in love with it, she had given it to me.

‘I’m decent now.’

As he turned, I realised that from where he had been standing the mirror would have given him as good a view of me as if he had not turned his back. Had he, or had he not, looked? It seemed to me that I detected amusement lurking in his eyes, and I flushed as pink as the butterflies.

‘Mm . . . charming,’ he said, as he sat down. I knew he wanted me to think he wasn’t referring to the kimono, and that he was enjoying my blushes. The maddening thing was that although part of me was furious with him, another part responded to his teasing and the element of tenderness in it. Spurious tenderness, of course, but dangerously effective all the same.

‘Would you please go away?’ I said, trying to sound cold and indifferent.

‘Yes, in a minute, but first I have something to say to you.’ And now the amusement was

gone. His expression was serious. 'The next few days are going to be difficult for everyone, and they won't be made easier by us being at odds with each other.'

'That's hardly my fault.'

'No, it's mine,' he admitted. 'I made a very stupid blunder, but I'd hoped that you would have thought about it as much as I have, and perhaps now took a different attitude from what you felt at the time.'

I kept my eyes fixed on the cup of tea on my lap. 'I - I do regret what I said to you outside my hotel . . . about your plane crashing. That was very wrong, but I was angry.'

'I realised that,' he said quietly. 'I never supposed that you meant it.'

There was a long pause which eventually I ended by saying, 'I agree that it's better if no one else knows there's been a change in our relationship, particularly Mother and Miss Wallace, both of whom seem to think you're the personification of decency. But you can hardly expect me to forget what happened at your flat, and to trust you again the way I used to.'

'I don't know why you ever did - if by trusting me you mean you assumed I was as indifferent to you as a woman as your chum Laurence Whatsisname.'

'Well, I don't know why, but I did. I don't any more.'

‘Good,’ said Simon. ‘I’m glad of it. The four of us may have grown up together, but not as a family, not closely enough to preclude any other relationship. You never “trusted” Rupert not to make love to you.’

‘That was entirely different. I loved *him*. If the situation had been reversed, Rupert would never have made a pass at me knowing how I felt about you.’

‘At the time I made “a pass”, as you put it, Rupert was not free, or likely to be,’ said Simon. ‘But now of course he is, isn’t he? And still your hero, apparently. Still your knight *sans peur et sans reproche*. Literally your knight now. Sir Rupert Fontaine, one of the last flowers of chivalry.’ And he gave a sort of savage laugh which made me look up and meet his eyes.

At this point, the telephone rang and, as I was to learn later, all calls to Le Manoir were being connected to our house and answered by Simon. With a swallowed curse he sprang up and went to answer it.

He left me in a state of considerable shock. Since the day before yesterday I had known Dina was dead without fully grasping what it meant to me personally. It had become so fixed in my mind that Rupert could never be my husband, and I had been so obsessed by the fear that he might have killed her that her death had seemed a disaster, not a release from an unhappy bond.

Strangely, I felt no uplifting surge of joy. Perhaps that would come later, but at present the dreadful circumstances of her end overshadowed everything.

As I dressed, I pondered Simon's bitter jibe about Rupert being one of the last flowers of chivalry. The only explanation seemed to be that it was the eruption of a deep-rooted jealousy which none of us had ever suspected.

Perhaps, in spite of his success in journalism and television, deep down there was a lingering resentment from the days when he had been merely the housekeeper's son, and Dina had told him he was lucky to be allowed to play with us. Perhaps that taunt had rankled more than we realised, and perhaps secretly he had chafed at Rupert's superior education being wasted on someone not only less clever but far less industrious than himself.

When I went downstairs, Mother said, 'Ah, you look much better for your rest. It was I who stopped the alarm clock. I peeped in, and you were dead to the world, so I turned it off. Rupert is back. He's in the sitting-room with Peter. Why not go and say hello? Miss Baines has gone for a walk with Simon as escort in case any reporters are lying in wait for her. Her photograph has appeared in at least two papers, so they know what she looks like and could trail her here. God

forbid that we should have one of their wretched helicopters hovering over *this* house all day.'

I said, 'Thanks for the tea, but I wish you hadn't sent Simon up with it. I was in the buff, but for the eiderdown.'

'Oh, were you?' said Mother unconcernedly. 'Well, never mind, darling. I don't suppose Simon noticed or paid any attention.'

She hasn't an inkling, I thought. She still thinks of us as children. She and Dad have been at peace for so long that she's forgotten what it's like to be young and unhappy and uncertain.

When I entered the sitting-room, Rupert was seated on the sofa with his son leaning comfortably against him. They were looking at a picture book together.

When he saw me, Rupert stood up. I was startled by the change in his appearance since in our meeting in London eighteen months ago. I had expected to find him careworn and haggard, but instead he had put on weight and his face was more florid than I remembered.

'Hello, Anny.' He took my hands. 'It was good of you to come.'

'I thought there might be some way I could help.'

'Indeed there is. Has your mother told you that Nanny is leaving us? You could look after Peter until I can get a replacement for her, and in the circumstances, that may not be too easy.'

This is the first time you've seen him, isn't it?' – turning to the child on the sofa who was looking up at us with unblinking dark eyes.

'No, I saw him soon after he was born when I came home for Christmas. You and . . . you were in Tobago.'

I went down on my knees by the sofa, and smiled at the child. 'Hello, Peter.'

He was almost two and a half now, and uncannily like his mother. In general I liked small children, but, perhaps because of the resemblance, I did not warm to this one. He was expensively dressed in a Continental manner with small leather boots in place of shoes, and a red and white sweater under his red bib-and-braces instead of the pint-sized guernseys we had worn from nursery days onwards.

'He's a very intelligent little fellow, but not much of a talker as yet,' said Rupert.

I was glad he seemed so fond of the child, for to have no mother and an indifferent father would have been a poor start in life for him.

During supper I watched Peter's nanny chatting to Simon, and wondered why Dina had chosen her. She was not at all the jolly, homely girl I should have wanted for my child had I been unwilling or unable to care for it myself. By this time Peter was in bed, and Miss Baines had put on a dress much less becoming than the neat grey uniform in which I had seen her earlier. She



had a bad skin, and showed a lot of gum when she talked. She was obviously one of Simon's fans and, to give the devil his due, he put up with her very pleasantly, showing no sign of being bored by her ceaseless gush of banalities.

In the middle of the meal I remembered my promise to ring up Miss Wallace.

'I should go and do it now,' said Mother, when I had explained the cause of my sudden exclamation of dismay.

The call to France was frustrated by some telephonic hitch which was causing several hours' delay. When I mentioned this on my return to the dining-room, Simon, who had been attending to Miss Baines when I left the table, said, 'As you rang her from Jersey last night, she isn't likely to worry. You'd reached St Malo safely. Nothing much could go wrong on the rest of the journey.'

'I don't remember saying I'd telephoned her from Jersey.'

'You didn't. She told me,' he said. 'I rang her myself this afternoon. I'm rather fond of her too, you know, and you did mention where she is staying.'

'You see why I called him a rock,' said Mother to me, in an undertone, when Miss Baines had reclaimed his attention.

I had to admit it was a relief to know Simon had already spoken to Miss Wallace so that, even

if I failed to get through until tomorrow, she would not be greatly concerned.

It was not Simon who preoccupied my thoughts as I prepared for bed that night. I was worried by Rupert's assumption – which I had not liked to contradict within seconds of offering my help – that I would take charge of Peter for him.

Had I been a free agent I would have done so willingly; but I couldn't leave Miss Wallace waiting in Tours indefinitely, and even if I put her to the expensive inconvenience of going home by train and bus, I couldn't give up my job at short notice, even if Moira Baines could. Miss Wallace had thrown me a lifeline when I was drowning in a despair largely of Rupert's making. Now, as much as he needed me, and as much as I wanted to respond, I couldn't shrug off my responsibility to her.

I woke very early next morning, and dressed and went out for a walk. It was the hour of the dawn chorus and, but for the birds, I seemed to have the world to myself. But before I had gone very far I heard a soft whistle behind me which I knew was not made by a bird, and I turned to see Simon following me.

'You were very quiet getting up, but when you let the water out of your hand-basin it goes glug in my waste-pipe,' he said. He was sleeping

in the room next to mine. 'Do you mind if I join you?'

'If I say "yes", will you go the other way?'

'No, because I need your help to save Rupert from spending the next two or three months in avoidable hell. If you understand what's in store for him, you'll be better equipped to persuade him to take to the hills.'

'What do you mean?' I asked anxiously.

Simon fell into step beside me, matching his long-legged stride to my shorter pace. We were both wearing ancient, faded guernseys, and gumboots because of the dew.

'I think I'm the only one who realises just how horrific this business could become,' he began. 'The best we can hope for is that Dina's fall was entirely her fault. If anyone else was involved in the accident, and it leads to a manslaughter charge, then I hate to think of the outcome. The defending counsel will have no scruples about blackening Dina in order to whitewash his client, and when a person is dead there's practically no limit to what can be said to discredit them.'

'Do you think it could have been manslaughter?'

'I don't know, and the police are being cagey. I can't worm anything out of them.'

'What did you mean about Rupert taking to the hills?'

‘I can arrange for him to be spirited away from here as soon as the inquest is over. Also, I know a place where he can stay without any fear of being discovered. You see, it won’t be only the English press which will be after him. The Continental news-magazines will also be hounding him, and people who never see them have no idea of the spiteful stories which they publish about our Royals and anyone else in the public eye, and which are devoured and presumably believed by their readers.’

‘But Rupert has done nothing scandalous. Why should they pillory him?’

‘They’ll ridicule him for being fool enough to marry her. Do you remember Dina’s French friend, Sophie?’

I nodded.

‘And do you remember that when Dina made that dramatic entrance at Rupert’s coming of age party, she was wearing a Dior cloak and had Vuitton luggage?’

‘Yes, I thought she must have married a millionaire.’

‘Sophie’s father was the next best thing to a millionaire. Dina didn’t marry him. She became his “close friend”, to use the up-to-date idiom. In fact she hadn’t formally resigned that role when she came back to Carlou.’

I was appalled. ‘How do you know this?’

'I have colleagues and friends in France. Dina wasn't the sort of mistress a married man keeps discreetly tucked away. She belonged to the school of Polaire and Forzane, and the other extravagant *demi-mondaines* of the pre-World War One period. And Sophie's papa, being a widower, didn't mind her flamboyant goings-on. Probably they boosted his ego. So when she ditched him to reappear as the bride of the Seigneur of Carlou, it was a great joke. But even if I'd known all this before the marriage, there wasn't much I could have done. How can you tell a friend that his future bride is a . . . '

He left the sentence unfinished.

For a moment I forgot the tension between us, and thought of him only as the friend of a lifetime. 'Oh, Simon, what a hideous mess! And will it ever be forgotten? Poor little Peter: it must be horrible to discover that both your mother and grandmother were bad lots.'

'Nobody worth knowing will blame him,' said Simon briskly. 'So you see why it will be much better if we can persuade Rupert to cut and run? Not only will they not be able to pester him, but kind friends won't be able to send him cuttings of the nastiest revelations.'

'Would they?' I asked, revolted.

'They would,' he assured me, in a grim tone.

‘Of course I’ll do all I can to make Rupert agree. But what is to happen to Peter while Rupert is incommunicado? He takes it for granted that I’ll take charge of the child, but I can’t leave Miss Wallace just like that’ – snapping my fingers.

‘I’m glad to hear you say so. I was afraid you might put your feeling for him above everything.’

‘And blithely abandon an old lady of seventy who’s been very kind to me? Thank you: you do have a high opinion of my character.’

‘Love makes idiots of us all,’ he said, with a shrug. ‘As far as the boy is concerned, Rupert has several mainland relations with nurseries of their own where Peter can spend a few months without coming to harm.’

We had reached one of my favourite vantage points, a headland of rabbit-nibbled turf where large rocks provided shelter whichever way the wind was blowing and which overlooked a wide seascape encompassing Sark, Herm, little humpy Jethou and, beyond them, the long line of Guernsey.

On my way out of the house I had taken a piece of kitchen paper and filled it with sultanas and walnuts from Mother’s storage jars because I knew from experience that the fresh dawn air kindled an appetite. By tacit consent we sat on a

large flat rock, and when I proffered my supplies, Simon produced a couple of apples.

‘It must have been a bad time for you when you thought Rupert might have killed her,’ he remarked presently. ‘Had that possibility occurred to you before old Grison mentioned it?’

‘Yes, it had,’ I admitted. ‘But all that concerned me was Rupert being sent to prison. I never thought of it as an evil act on his part. I suppose I took it for granted that she would have driven him to it.’

Someone was coming along the path which skirted the beach on the southern side of the headland. The path there was narrow and flanked by thickets of jaon and blackthorn so that only intermittent glimpses of the walker’s head and shoulders could be seen.

Simon said, ‘So if after a decent interval Rupert asks you to marry him, you’ll accept?’

‘Yes . . . yes, of course.’ But as I spoke, I was again conscious of the absence of any upsurge of happiness.

Simon flung the core of his apple high into the dawn-lit sky and I watched it soar and fall out of sight to the rocks. It was not cold sitting there. It was my thoughts which made me shiver, and he must have shared them, for he put his hand over mine, and said, ‘Sorry . . . stupid thing to do . . . don’t think about it.’

His hand was warm and strong and comforting, and it was an involuntary reflex to return the pressure of his fingers. But it was a reflex I regretted a few moments later when his fingers interlocked with mine, and I met his eyes and saw in them the glint of amusement which had such a disturbing effect on me.

I freed my hand and stood up, but was prevented from saying anything by the sound of the third early-riser clambering up the steps to the plateau of ground where we were.

A few moments later I saw her: the stout, white-haired holidaymaker whom I had passed yesterday. She was panting and flushed, and she stood for a moment, speechless, catching her breath.

‘Ooh, I’m out of condition,’ she announced. ‘Good morning. What a lovely morning!’

I smiled and agreed. Inwardly I was raging at Simon for seizing any opportunity to pursue his extraordinarily ill-timed, ill-judged and unwelcome advances.

The woman turned to speak to him, and her friendly expression changed to the look of someone confronted with a face they know but cannot place.

‘Simon,’ she said. ‘Simon Herault.’

I waited to see what polite technique he had developed for dealing with chance encounters with members of his public. Then, to



my amazement, she opened her arms and moved forward, and he gave her a hearty hug and kissed both her cheeks.

‘I’d no idea you were here. When did you arrive?’

‘We’ve been here four days. I’m glad you recognise me. I’ve given up tinting my hair, and there’s a lot more of me than there was ten years ago,’ she said, with a look of wry humour.

‘You look splendid,’ he told her warmly. And with his arm round her shoulders, he turned to me and introduced her. ‘This is Flora Morris, an old friend of mine. Flora – Andelys Brelade.’

‘Now that’s a pretty name,’ she said. ‘Andelys. Is it French?’

‘It was my grandmother’s name. It may have been Norman originally. Would you excuse me, Mrs Morris? I’m sure you and Simon must have a great deal to talk about, and I should be at home helping my mother to cook the breakfast.’

As I hurried away, I knew that I had taken my leave too abruptly. I should have exchanged some more pleasantries before excusing myself, but as soon as he had told me her name I had felt a strong distaste for her company. No doubt she had changed a great deal from the woman whom Simon had loved as a sixteen-year-old schoolboy. Seeing her as she was now, it was almost impossible to imagine that ten years ago

she had been more attractive to him than Dina. Yet there was still something about her . . . an aura of warmth, of sweetness. Just before Simon had hugged her, there had been on his face a look I had never seen before. It fretted me all the way home because I couldn't define it.

An hour later, when everyone else in the house had assembled for breakfast, Mother said, 'Perhaps Simon has overslept. Just run up and bang on his door, dear.'

'We went out for an early walk, and he met an old friend. He may not be back for some time,' I explained.

'Who was the old friend?' asked Rupert.

'A holidaymaker. A stranger to me,' I answered, deliberately vague.

In fact it was soon after nine when Simon appeared in the doorway of the little linen room where I was pressing the blouse I had washed the night before.

'You're back unexpectedly soon. I told Mother you might be out for lunch.'

'I'm not on holiday,' he reminded me. 'The telephone won't stop ringing because I met an old friend. You shot away at great speed.'

'I felt my presence would be superfluous.'

'Not at all. You would have made up a foursome. Flora has married again. He's a stonemason, a much more suitable husband for her than her first one, and a most interesting man.'

'I saw them together yesterday morning on my way up from the harbour. I would never have guessed she was your Mrs Morris.'

Simon folded his arms and leaned against the jamb, watching me. 'As she said, she's changed in ten years. I shall always feel an affection for her, but I find it hard to understand why I wanted to marry her. Don't you think that in a few years from now you might be equally puzzled by your adolescent affections?'

'You can hardly compare mine with yours. The sort of liaison you had with Mrs Morris never does last.'

'I don't know that day-dreams are very durable either,' Simon said dryly. 'Real love, between grown-up people, is never founded on illusion: and if Rupert were really the sterling character you think him, neither Dina nor any other woman could have botched up his life to this extent.'

I set the iron on its heel, and said fiercely, 'This morning you told me that even if you had known about Dina's life in France you couldn't have said anything to Rupert. You seem to have no compunction about running *him* down to me. I don't know what your motive is, Simon, but the only result you're achieving is to make me think less of you.'

'I thought I had already reached rock-bottom in your estimation.' He straightened and went downstairs.

With a sigh of relief I resumed my ironing. I found his behaviour incomprehensible. Yesterday, in my bedroom, he had admitted that he had behaved badly at his flat, and had more or less said that he hoped the intervening months had cooled my anger. Yet his last words, a moment ago, had seemed a deliberate reminder of that night, and indeed his behaviour early this morning on the headland had begun to verge from friendly to amorous.

Could his attitude to me be bound up with his suppressed resentment of Rupert? One tended to forget that Simon was the child of a broken marriage, and the lack of a father's influence was supposed to cause all kinds of complexes. Yet somehow none of these explanations rang true. Until recently I would have said he was one of the most stable, uncomplicated people I was ever likely to meet. Now . . . I just couldn't make him out at all.

The following day the inquest revealed that Dina's short, selfish life had ended in a débâcle worse than the worst of rumours. For once the sensational papers were not exaggerating when they headed their reports of the inquiry ORGY IN ISLAND MANSION, and the medical evidence

showed that not drink but a drug had made Dina think she could fly like a bird from the parapet of the flat roof.

After the inquest and the funeral, Rupert needed no further persuasion to fall in with Simon's plans to smuggle him into hiding. 'Smuggle' was no exaggeration as, unbeknown to anyone but my parents and me, Rupert left Carlou by night on board a sailing dinghy which, at Simon's behest, had come across from Normandy to fetch him. But not even to us did Simon divulge where Rupert was going to spend his exile.

I had no private conversation with him before he left. The inquest had been a trauma which he needed time to get over before the future had any meaning for him. I understood that, and did not expect him to commit himself to anything new until the hurts of the past few years were less raw.

Simon had prevailed on Moira Baines to stay at her post a little longer until Peter could be fetched by one of his father's English relations. So with Rupert, and the child's immediate future taken care of, I had no reason not to return to St Malo to pick up the car and rejoin Miss Wallace. However, since my arrival I had been fighting a bug which, when I met Mother on my way to the bathroom on the morning of my intended departure, caused her

to say, 'You look like nothing on earth, my girl. Back to bed with you. No, don't argue. A couple of days' delay won't trouble Miss Wallace. She doesn't want a bad 'flu-cold at her age, of that I'm quite sure.'

As I was feeling rotten, with a headache and pains in every joint, I submitted to Mother's orders and returned to bed where I spent the day taking cold powders and hot lemon drinks, and napping.

When Mother brought up a light supper, there was an envelope on the tray.

'What's this?' I asked.

'A note from Simon. He didn't say goodbye in person because he didn't want to catch your bug, if it hasn't already bitten him.'

'I didn't realise he was leaving today.'

'Why should he stay any longer?'

'No, there's nothing more to keep him,' I agreed.

*Dear Andelys, Simon had written, It may be several days before you feel up to travelling, so I will pick up the car and chauffeur Miss W. back to base. I have some leave owing to me, and may spend a few days with her. Presumably you have no objection to my occupying your bed as long as you aren't in it. Yours ever - Simon.*

Fortunately Mother had already left the room, and did not see the colour which burned my face as I read the last line. Even if she had,

she might have thought only that I was running a temperature.

When, later, she returned with a large baked apple topped by a generous dollop of fresh cream, I asked, 'Did you know Simon had gone to fetch Miss Wallace?'

'Yes, I thought it was so sweet of him to want to spare you the journey. He's been a tower of strength throughout this whole beastly business.'

Through a mouthful of apple and cream I made a sound which she could construe as assent, but I was thinking that 'sweet' was the last adjective I should apply to him.

Next day I felt better, but Mother made me stay in bed where I lay sometimes reading, but mostly listening to Chopin. I felt sure my lassitude was largely reaction to a profound emotional shock, and I wondered how Rupert was feeling after his much greater shock, and where he was at the moment.

After two days in bed my normal energy revived, and I woke on the third morning intending to return to the mainland. However, soon after breakfast Miss Wallace telephoned to tell me she was in Paris, having a little holiday with Simon. If I was feeling better, why didn't I join them there?

I said it was kind of her to suggest it, and although I was better I didn't feel like sightseeing

and would rather remain with my parents. Had Miss Wallace been in Paris on her own, I should have been glad to join her. It was Simon's presence which made me beg off. After the call I felt unaccountably depressed again. I supposed it was an after-effect of the 'flu.

I helped Mother in the house all morning, and after lunch I went for a walk. It was a hot day, more like early summer than spring, which in the island began long before it reached England or France. I was determined to concentrate my thoughts on trivial matters, and when I had walked for some time I sat down in the sun and started planning in my mind a Florentine waistcoat to wear with plain shirts and skirts. I was wishing I had a pencil and paper to jot down some possible colour combinations when Flora Morris, as she had been, came along the path, and sat down and began to talk to me.

This time I could not escape without being rude, and after a while – as was inevitable – she brought Simon into the conversation. I did not want to listen to her singing his praises, and was thankful when at last we parted company after I had politely refused an invitation to go to their holiday cottage for a cup of tea and to meet her husband.

Walking home, suddenly I felt a strong desire to be back at the shop, or anywhere but where I was. Fortunately when Simon had



persuaded Mother to filch my key ring from the dressing-table, he had not gone off with them all but had merely detached the car's ignition key. So I had my front and back door keys, and was not locked out of Abbey Antiques until Miss Wallace returned from her Parisian fling.

I was alone at the shop for two nights before she and Simon returned and were surprised to find the shop open and me busy changing the window display. Simon did not put up at the pub for a night. He went straight back to London. But for the rest of the week Miss Wallace kept regaling me with tales of their adventures in Paris, and while I was delighted to hear she had had a good time there to compensate for being left on her own at Tours, I reached the point of feeling that if Simon – everyone's paragon but mine – was mentioned once more, I should explode.

Rupert was abroad for nearly three months. He told us later that his refuge had been a summer chalet belonging to a German friend of Simon's. It was on the shore of the Pantano de Pena, an isolated reservoir in the highlands near Valderrobres in north-east Spain. The dam containing the lake was five kilometres from the nearest tarred road, and even on his weekly excursions to Valderrobres for food he had felt no fear of being recognised. The only people he saw

were local anglers and, on Sundays, family picnic parties. It was a perfect sanctuary for anyone hiding from the ruthless spotlight of the press.

I knew that he had returned when I received a letter from Carlou addressed in an unfamiliar hand. Rupert wrote that he had given careful thought to the future, and had decided to turn Le Manoir into a hotel, and to make his home in the long-disused dower house. There were three reasons for this decision. Le Manoir was full of unhappy associations for him; Dina's extravagances had made serious inroads into his financial resources; he felt that the lifestyle of his predecessors was an anachronism in the modern world.

Because the conversion of Le Manoir, and the modernisation and decoration of the dower house, were considerable undertakings, it was his earnest hope (how Simon would have scorned that phrase!) that I would be willing to help him with both projects. Not only was I qualified to advise him about which possessions to keep and which to sell, but I would know better than anyone the kind of home he wanted for himself and his son. This sentence was underlined.

My immediate reaction to the letter was amazement and horror that he should even contemplate leaving the home which, to me, had always been the most beautiful house in the

world. Dina's death was not the first terrible thing which had happened there. Surely, after a time, the unhappy memories would fade? Le Manoir was more than a house. It was a heritage which grew increasingly precious with each successive generation. To write Finis to more than four centuries of Fontaine family history because one spoilt girl had upset its peace for a mere four years seemed an act of madness.

I wrote to Rupert in this vein, urging him to delay any vital decisions for at least six months more, and adding that, although I would always want to help him in any way possible, the one thing I could never do was to desert Miss Wallace.

By return of post I received a second letter from him in which he explained in detail the extent of Dina's wild spending. I found it incredible that any one woman could squander so much money; and even more incredible that Rupert had acquiesced to her extravagance. He had denied her nothing. She had lived in the manner of someone married to an international financier rather than to a country landowner whose modest wealth, although not depleted by death duties as it would have been on the mainland, was wholly inadequate to meet the demands of a woman who expected to keep flats in London and Paris, to drive an Italian sports car, to dress at Givenchy, to spend winter

holidays in the West Indies, skiing holidays at St Moritz, and summer holidays on whatever was the most fashionable *plage* or *playa* in the Mediterranean.

When she was in London, her account at a Bond Street beauty salon had run to fifteen pounds a week. Daily she had smoked forty cigarettes of a most expensive brand. How any sane man could have been persuaded to sell the investments which provided the major part of his income in order to buy furs and jewels was beyond my understanding. As I thought about it, I could not help recalling something Simon had said to me. *If he really were the sterling character you think him, neither Dina nor any other woman could have botched up his life.*

Was it true? Was Rupert a weak man? And could a man of stronger character have controlled even Dina? I couldn't see how any husband could prevent a wife from frittering the housekeeping money, or buying certain things on credit. But equally I couldn't see how a husband could be forced to underwrite continuous extravagance over a long period. It was therefore difficult to avoid the conclusion that Rupert's financial problems were largely of his own making.

It was I who sorted the morning post, and my correspondence with friends in the Embroiderers' Guild made it not too difficult to

conceal the arrival of Rupert's letters from Miss Wallace. I did not want her to know he was writing to me because, if she did, she would soon guess it was only my duty to and affection for her which kept me in England.

My loyalty was not strained for long.

One morning in August I took Miss Wallace her early tea and found her still asleep. I put the tray on the chest of drawers beside the door, and went to the window to open the curtains. Her bedroom faced east and, as the sunlight flooded in, I expected her to stir, and to murmur, 'Ah, tea . . . how nice. Thank you, my dear,' as she did every morning.

But when I turned, smiling, towards the bed, her eyelids remained closed. After a busy, happy day, she had died in her sleep, which was how she had hoped her life would end.

At nine o'clock I telephoned the surgery and told our doctor's receptionist what had happened. She said she was very sorry to hear it, and the doctor would call as soon as he could. I would have kept the shop closed, but it was the day of a big auction in the nearest town, and I knew there would be at least a dozen dealers calling on us on their way to and from the sale. So I raised the blind on the door, and turned the card from *Closed* to *Open* and began the normal routine.

When Mrs Evans came to clean, she was shocked that I should be dusting the window display with Miss Wallace not yet cold, as she put it. But I could not sob, as she did, for a woman in her seventy-first year who had died in her own comfortable bedroom without fear or pain or indignity. I could only be glad for Miss Wallace, and sad for everyone who would miss her as much as I should.

I gave Mrs Evans some brandy, and told her not to bother with the cleaning, but to go home and recover herself. She went; not to go home, but to spread the word through the village.

When Doctor Lovell arrived, I was making coffee for an elderly dealer who had known Miss Wallace for thirty years. It was after Doctor Lovell's visit that I realised I ought to notify Simon.

There was no reply from his flat, but he had given us the number of the telephone in the porter's lodge so that, in any emergency, we could find out his movements and leave messages. The porter told me Mr Herault was in residence at present, and he would put a note through his letterbox asking him to ring me as soon as possible.

It was mid-afternoon when I picked up the receiver and heard his quiet, low-pitched voice say, 'Andelys? Simon here.'

After I had told him the news there was silence at the other end of the line. Eventually he said, 'I'll be with you in a couple of hours,' and rang off before I could say it wasn't necessary for him to drop everything if he was busy.

I had seen him on several occasions during the summer, but never *à deux*. In Miss Wallace's presence he had behaved as if the night at his flat had never happened.

When he arrived, his first question was, 'You're staying at the Rectory until after the funeral presumably?'

'No, I'm staying here. Why should I go to the Rectory?'

'It's not very pleasant being alone in a house with a dead person.'

'That depends on who's dead. I couldn't be afraid of Miss Wallace. Anyway, even if I were nervous, the Rector's wife is much too ill now to cope with visitors, poor thing.'

'Well, you may not mind sleeping here, but I mind for you,' said Simon decisively. 'We'll both put up at the pub. I can't stay here with you for two reasons. The sofa is too short for me, and Miss Wallace wouldn't like it. She had her generation's ideas of propriety, and I see no reason to disregard them because she's no longer here in person.'

He asked me to make him a snack while he rang up the pub and I went to the kitchen and started grating cheese for an omelette.

'That's fixed up,' he said, when he joined me. 'Have you put a notice in the paper?'

'I never gave it a thought.'

'I'll deal with it for you. I think there should be one in *The Times* as well as in the local paper. There'll be a lot of *Times* readers who will remember her from years ago.'

By the time he came back again, I had mixed a salad and made coffee.

'Do your parents know?' Simon asked, when he sat down and I started to cook the omelette.

'Yes. They're rather upset that they won't be able to come to the funeral, but how can they leave a full house?'

'Did you ring Rupert?'

'No, Mother said she would tell him.'

'Then he will ring you,' said Simon.

Later he went upstairs to Miss Wallace's room, and when he came down, he said, 'I've seen scores of people who've been killed in accidents and wars, but I've never seen someone who died peacefully before. It restores the balance a little.'

'I think she had a happy life, in spite of losing James.'

'Was James the young man in the photograph by her bed?'



‘Yes, he was killed in the summer of 1916. I’m glad you took her to Paris, Simon. You gave her a wonderful time. She was always talking about it. She once told me that it was a very curious sensation to look in a mirror and see an old lady looking back at her. She said that, inside themselves, people felt the same at seventy as they did at twenty or thirty. I have a feeling that sometimes in Paris she imagined she was a girl and it wasn’t you with her, but James.’

‘I played that game myself,’ said Simon.

Before I could ask him what he meant, the telephone rang. It was Miss Wallace’s solicitor who lived nearby and had heard the news from his wife. He wanted to know if he might call on me on his way home.

When he came, I introduced Simon, and Mr Morley said, ‘Ah, so you have someone to turn to, Miss Brelade. That was what concerned us. As an old friend of Miss Wallace as well as her legal adviser, I was going to suggest that you might like to stay with us until after the funeral, rather than being on your own here. But if Mr Herault is looking after you, we need feel no further concern.’

He stayed for a glass of sherry, and before he left, he said, ‘It’s too soon to be thinking about the future, I know. However, I might just mention that, apart from some minor bequests, Miss Wallace has left everything to you. She

spoke of the happiness you had brought her when she changed her will in your favour. Previously she had directed that all her property should be sold and the proceeds given to various charities. As you know, she had no family left, and her affection for you could not have been warmer had you been her real granddaughter.'

I blinked, and had to clench my teeth. Although I had my back to him, Simon seemed to sense that I was fighting back tears. He said, 'I'll see you out, sir,' and, as he passed me to go to the door with Mr Morley, he thrust into my hand a clean handkerchief.

I had recovered myself by the time he came back. He said, 'Have another glass of sherry, and then we'll go and have a quiet dinner somewhere.'

There had been no telephone call from Rupert by the time we left the house. It was possible that he was not at home at present. Mother had written to me that the number of summer day-trippers had quadrupled this year, which was good for the islanders whose crafts were on sale in the gift shop, but not so good for the Seigneur who, between ten o'clock in the morning when the first boatload landed, and sunset when the last boat left, could not go outside his own grounds without becoming the cynosure of the ghouls. Perhaps, I thought, he

has taken refuge again, this time with his cousins in England.

In the morning, again I opened the shop and a touchingly large number of our private customers came to express their sorrow and sympathy. The local paper sent a reporter, a mannerly youth not yet hardened to the awkwardness of visiting houses where someone had died. I lent him a photograph of Miss Wallace, and answered his diffident questions about her. He was the antithesis of the vulture-like television and gutter press reporters who had jostled round Rupert after the inquest, thrusting microphones under his nose and excusing their subhuman behaviour with the plea that they were only doing their job.

'It does seem sad that if he wants to get to the top he'll have to become like those others,' I remarked to Simon, later on.

'Don't you believe it,' said Simon. 'Nobody ever *has* to behave badly.'

He had gone to the chemist to buy razor blades, and I was alone when a taxi drew up outside and I saw Rupert stepping out. I went outside to meet him. I had thought him rather overweight before, and since the spring he had become even more burly, and it didn't suit him. It shocked me to find myself looking at him critically. *Love is not love which alters when it alteration finds . . .*

‘Anny!’ We shook hands and he kissed my cheek. ‘I came as soon as I could. Your parents are very anxious, particularly your father. I told them I’d see to everything and bring you home with me. It won’t be necessary for you to hang about here until all the loose ends are tied up. That can be done by the solicitors. We need only stay for the funeral.’

He cupped my face between his palms which, understandably after a journey on a hot day, felt a little sticky against my cheeks. He said in a lowered voice, ‘I was afraid it might be years before you felt free to come home. I know you were fond of the old girl and are bound to be sad at present. But I must say from my point of view it’s a happy release.’

We went indoors and I offered him tea. ‘Or perhaps you’d prefer a can of Simon’s cold beer?’

‘Is he here?’

‘Yes, he came yesterday. He didn’t want me to stay in the house by myself last night, so we both put up at the pub. I’d better find out if they’ve got a third room for you.’

‘I can have his. He doesn’t need to stay now I’m here.’

‘I think he will want to stay, Rupert. If, as her solicitor says, Miss Wallace thought of me as a kind of adopted grandchild, she certainly felt

the same about Simon, and he was very attached to her.'

At this point Simon returned and the two men greeted each other. Watching them, it flashed through my mind that in twenty years' time Simon would look much as he did now, except that his hair might be grey, and the lines which formed when he laughed would be permanently imprinted on his face. Rupert, I saw with a paunch and a fleshy red neck.

I thrust the unkind thought from me, ashamed that I who, only a few years ago, had been a plump girl should now be unsympathetic to other people's weight problems. It was hardly surprising if Rupert had eaten and drunk more than was good for his figure during his time in the Spanish backwoods. He was not the first person to have turned to food for comfort, and when he was happy again he would soon recover his Rollo-the-Viking good looks.

On the morning of Miss Wallace's funeral, Simon said to me, 'If you don't mind, Andelys, I think I'll get back to London as soon as the service is over.'

'Thank you for all you've done, Simon.'

'Very little,' he said, dismissing my thanks with a shrug. 'I take it you mean to sell up and go back to Carlou to help Rupert with his projects?'

‘Yes, but not immediately. There’s a good deal of sorting out here which only I can do. It should take about ten days, I think. That reminds me, you haven’t yet chosen your keepsakes.’

Mr Morley liked to observe the old-fashioned custom of reading the will to the legatees after the funeral. But he had already told me that it was a rather complicated document which provided for me to keep the shop if I wished, or to sell it to launch another business elsewhere. But if I did not intend to continue in the trade on my own, one third of the proceeds of sale were to go to Simon. Also Simon was to choose three things to remind him of Miss Wallace’s affection for him.

We went round the house together and eventually he asked me if he could have the red wing chair, an unsigned, amusingly naïve gouache painted in the early nineteenth century, and a creamware plate with a transfer print of a sailing vessel.

As I wrapped the painting and the plate for him to put them in his car, I said, ‘Where does your immediate future lie, or have you no idea?’

‘I don’t know. I expect I shall be given another foreign assignment before too long,’ he answered. ‘Meanwhile I intend to follow some advice I once gave you.’

‘What was that?’ I asked, looking up, puzzled.

‘I’m going to stop wasting my life by living on hope.’

I didn’t understand what he meant, and just then Rupert came in, and Simon and I had no further conversation on our own.

When we shook hands before parting, he said, ‘I expect it will be a long time before we meet again. I’m unlikely to come back to Carlou. Good luck, Andelys.’

Then he shook hands with Rupert, and walked away, out of our lives.

After three days of kicking his heels while I was too busy even to talk to him, except in preoccupied monosyllables, Rupert agreed to return to Carlou ahead of me.

His departure was a relief as, not being a collector or even mildly interested in antiques – in spite of growing up surrounded by museum-quality pieces – he could not help me by minding the shop. Nor could he take over the cooking, and while I was content to make do with snacks whenever I happened to feel hungry, he seemed to feel that three cooked and punctual meals a day, with vegetables served from vegetable dishes and not, to save time, from saucepans, were essential to our health and well-being. Even in Spain, apparently, there had been a local woman to cook and clean for him. He had not to fend for himself as I had imagined. To do him

justice, he would have been delighted to take me out to lunch and dinner every day. But I couldn't spare the time at midday, and by evening I was tired and wanted to relax with a salad and a glass of wine in the garden, not to dress up and go out.

It was on the day he left that I found the letter from Miss Wallace. It was in the box in her bedroom in which she kept her pension book, medical card and so on. I had put off going through her papers, but Mr Morley had urged me not to postpone the task for too long and so, although it felt uncomfortably like prying, I had opened the box and found the envelope addressed to me.

Inside was a single sheet of paper, undated, on which she had written – *My dearest Andelys, As he is unlikely ever to tell you himself, I feel that after my death you should know that it was Simon who persuaded me to take you as my apprentice, and who provided your salary from his own.*

*At that time the trade was not enjoying its present improvement and I had no thought of engaging an assistant until Simon put forward his proposal. Fond as I was of you, dear child, I was reluctant to agree to his plan. However, in the end he convinced me that it was essential for you to leave Carlou, and that no other post was likely to appeal to you, or to be acceptable to*



*your parents. Fortunately the trade has picked up considerably since then, and for some time it has not been necessary for Simon to subsidise your salary.*

*But the fact that he undertook the responsibility at a time when he was not securely established in his own profession throws light on a side of his character which he chooses to disguise.*

*In telling you this I am betraying his confidence, which troubles me. I do not like to think of losing Simon's good opinion, as I must if you find it impossible to contain your natural desire to acknowledge his kindness. Nevertheless there are two reasons why I think you should be told; one being that it will clarify certain provisions in my will.*

*I need hardly add that Simon's plan has been as much to my benefit as yours. In spite of the fifty years between us, we have become friends, and friendship is surely the best and most lasting of all joys. Your affectionate mentor, Clementine Wallace.*

The letter came as such a shock to me that for the rest of the day I found it difficult to concentrate on anything else. I was amazed and not pleased to find myself so deeply in Simon's debt, not only in monetary terms, but for steering my life in a direction which had proved so suitable to my temperament and abilities. It

was uncomfortable to feel that he knew as much if not more about me than I did myself. It was also a disturbing reminder of the night when he had demonstrated his power to stir feelings I had not realised were dormant in me. Before that night at his flat, I should not have minded being indebted to him, but now I minded extremely. I was in the ambivalent situation of being justified in feeling a strong disaffection towards him while at the same time owing him gratitude. Had I known more about psychology then, I should have realised that the simultaneous existence in the human mind of two irreconcilable emotions or wishes is one of the commonest causes of stress.

For several days I couldn't decide what to do. Should I say nothing? Should I write to Simon? Would a letter discharge a little of my sense of obligation?

In the end, on impulse, I telephoned.

It was not he but a girl who answered.

'May I speak to Mr Herault, please?' I don't know why I called him that, rather than just Simon, but later I was glad of it.

'If you'll hold on, I'll fetch him.'

I heard the sound of the receiver being placed on the table. She had a soft, lispy voice which could only be an affectation. I couldn't stand little-girl voices, and it irked me that Simon

could put up with it because, presumably, she had a pretty face and figure.

She came back and picked up the telephone. 'Who is it who's calling?' she asked.

My impulse had died. I replaced the receiver. Simon, like everyone in the public eye whose number was not ex-directory, received a lot of odd calls. He had told us about them. When the girl told him I had rung off, he would think it was another crackpot fan-call.

For the rest of that evening I was fretted by a mental picture of the unknown girl in Simon's arms on the sofa where he had made love to me.

Early in September I returned to Carlou.

For a month or so all went well. I spent long, absorbed days cataloguing everything in Le Manoir, starting in the drawing-room and working my way up to the attics. In the evenings, with a plan I had drawn of the dower house, I visualised the rooms furnished with the cream of the treasures from the big house, and pondered what colour schemes would show them to their greatest advantage.

The task of selection was not as difficult as I had imagined. Years ago, before Miss Wallace had educated my taste, I had been impressed by things which now merely amused me. At the age of eleven, the stuffed polar bear had been among my heart's desires. Now it was the

Venetian blackamoor torchère at which I gazed with admiration.

Peter Fontaine was in the charge of another nanny, an older woman more suited to island life than Moira Baines. It worried me that I felt no desire to play with him, and indeed was rather bored by the child. If, in due course, I was going to become his stepmother, I would have to work up more interest than I took in him at present.

Since referring to the death of Miss Wallace as a happy release from his point of view, Rupert had said nothing about our future. But it was barely six months since the end of his first marriage, and I was in no hurry to have our unspoken understanding formalised. In fact my spirits sank at the thought of the revival of publicity which was bound to attend his remarriage.

I remembered how eagerly I had once looked forward to changing my name from Andelys Brelade to Andelys Fontaine. Now I felt none of that excitement.

As the autumn advanced I began to be conscious that life had lost much of its zest. The pattern of my days was too predictable. I met no one I did not already know. I heard no conversation which did not relate to the island. At Abbey Antiques we had never known from day to day what curious or beautiful object might come into our keeping, or who would be the next

person to call on us. Our only certainty had been that very few days would be dull ones.

Long ago, reading the life of Dorothy Osborne, whose father had been Governor of Guernsey during the Civil War, I had shared the longing she had expressed in a letter to her lover, William Temple.

*Do you remember Herm and the little house there?* she had written to him, during the five years of family opposition to the marriage. *Shall we go thither? That is next to being out of the world; there we might live like Baucis and Philemon and grow old together, and for our charity to some shipwrackt stranger, obtain the blessing of both dying at the same time.*

Dorothy and William had met in 1648 when she was twenty-one. A week before their wedding, she had taken ill with smallpox which had nearly killed her, and ruined her looks. I had ached with sympathy for her, but now I was beginning to feel that perhaps little islands like Herm and Carlou were rather too much 'out of the world'. Even my parents seemed to have become more parochial in their outlook lately. There were moments, particularly at meals, when their conversation made me want to burst out that life was too short to be wasted in endlessly rehashing petty differences among the other islanders.

When they were younger, it had been my mother who had exerted her mainland influence on Father. Now it seemed to be his influence which was the stronger, and both of them had surrendered to the hypnosis of television. As soon as the evening meal was over, Father would switch on the set, and on it would remain until bedtime. The effect of all this viewing was not to broaden their outlook but rather to depress their spirits, since the emphasis of the many news programmes they watched was always on the bad news.

While the long light evenings had lasted, I could escape the boredom of viewing with them by going for walks until darkness fell. But as the nights drew in I could only retire to my room, which displeased Father because he considered it wasteful to burn an electric fire upstairs when there was a comfortable blaze from the driftwood fire downstairs to warm me. He could not understand that in my time with Miss Wallace I had become used to sewing in peaceful silence, or to the music of Rachmaninov and Vivaldi.

I could not spend the evenings with Rupert because to do so would invite gossip, and anyway Rupert was as much a television addict as my father. He preferred the programmes about wild life to the comedy series which were Father's favourites, but he too watched TV all

evening, and I had an uneasy feeling that he might not discontinue the habit even when he had me for company.

It had become our custom to lunch together every day, and then to have coffee in the library – the one room not altered by Dina, where he spent all his time when indoors – and to continue discussing the progress of the alterations until the clock struck two.

One day, at the end of our lunch break, I rose to return to the dower house where I was working. As I passed Rupert's chair he leaned out and caught hold of my hand. Then, taking me by surprise, he pulled me on to his knees and buried his face against my shoulder.

'I'm so lonely, Anny,' he said, in a muffled voice. 'How long must we wait? When there's been so much scandal already, would anyone care if we ignored the conventions and married before the year is up?'

I put my arms round him and hugged him, but it was an involuntary response. Thus would I have held his small son had the child run to me for comfort after a fall. Thus might I have held my parents, or anyone suddenly at the end of their tether.

It was not until he raised his lips to mine that my mind unfroze from the shock of his unexpected action, and I knew that I did not want him to kiss me. Indeed the suppliance of

his posture dispelled my compassion and filled me with a strange revulsion.

‘No, Rupert - don’t!’ I exclaimed. As involuntarily as I had put my arms round him, I took them away and jumped from his lap.

‘What’s the matter?’ he asked, in puzzled surprise.

‘I - I don’t feel like that any more. I’m . . . just your friend now,’ I stammered.

My reply was as startling to me as it must have been to him. I had loved him so long and so painfully that I couldn’t believe all that passionate emotion had evaporated, leaving nothing but pity in its place.

‘I thought you loved me,’ he said blankly.

‘I did . . . I do, but in a different way now.’

The scene which followed was so upsetting that when I got home, although I had walked for a long time to recover from it, Mother knew at once that something unpleasant had happened.

In answer to her question, I said, ‘I’m not going to marry Rupert after all.’

I had thought she would be aghast, but she gave a deep sigh, and said quietly, ‘I wondered if you would, when it came to the point. I was never sure he was right for you, and lately I’ve felt that you weren’t at all happy here now. You’ve grown away from Carlou, haven’t you? You find it rather confining now?’

‘Yes, I do, I’m afraid.’



‘What will you do now?’ she asked. ‘Only last night in bed your father was saying how lucky it was the shop had been sold so quickly. He thought it might hang fire for months. Now it seems a pity it didn’t. But even if it were not too late to withdraw from the sale, perhaps you wouldn’t feel like carrying on alone, or with another partner.’

‘No, probably not.’

‘At least you’ve organised Rupert’s new home for him. How did he take it when he found you’d changed your mind?’

‘Not very well, naturally.’ It was an understatement, but there was no point in telling Mother that Rupert’s reaction had shattered my last illusions about him.

‘I should feel more sympathetic towards him if he hadn’t treated you so badly in the past,’ was her comment.

The next day I did not go to Le Manoir but wandered about the island, trying to accustom myself to the void left by the abrupt dissolution of all my hopes and plans. Having no fixed future any more, I found myself re-living the past; not the recent past, but the happy past of our childhood.

I stood on Raz Pointe and looked down at the *art nouveau* swirls of the tide-race, and remembered being rescued by Simon after Dina

had dared us to swim through those treacherous currents.

Half a mile further along the coast was the spot where, when I was eleven, I had got myself stuck on the cliff face. Following the Communist occupation of Tibet in 1950, the Maharajah of Nepal had given permission for climbers to tackle Mount Everest by a new route from the south. After the British expedition, led by Eric Shipton, had conquered several new peaks, we had spent many hours 'mountaineering' on the cliffs. As vividly as if it happened yesterday, I recalled my increasing panic, and the blessed relief when from somewhere not far away Simon's voice had said cheerfully, 'The last bit's easier than it looks, but I thought you might be a bit fagged, so I came back to give you a hand.'

That evening, after the six o'clock supper which my parents preferred out of season, I walked up to Le Manoir to retrieve my fountain pen which I felt sure I must have left there as it was not in my bag.

At first Rupert seemed to think the missing pen was a pretext to see him and tell him I had changed my mind.

When he realised I had not, he said, 'If you aren't going to marry me, what are you going to do with yourself?'

'Beyond going back to the mainland, I've no idea,' I admitted.

‘When do you plan to do that?’

‘The sooner the better, I suppose.’

‘Leaving me in the lurch with the house and everything,’ he said, in a bitter tone.

‘Oh, Rupert, that isn’t fair! You won’t be in the lurch. The new house is planned to the last Rawlplug. The carpets are organised, so are the curtains. There’s nothing for me to do now but wait for things to arrive and supervise their installation. That isn’t a full-time job, and you can cope with it quite easily.’

‘I shall have to, it seems,’ he said sulkily.

He put me completely out of patience with him, and I wondered why it had taken me so long to recognise the essential immaturity of his nature.

When he was forty, he would still be at heart an adolescent, easily swayed by other people, and subject to huffs if frustrated. I wanted my husband to be a man; a man I could respect as well as love.

It was dark when I left him, but I had a torch in my pocket, and anyway I could have walked blindfold from his house to ours. As I let myself into the hall, and unbuttoned my raincoat, I heard Simon’s voice from the sitting-room.

Simon here? Without warning? Why?

And it was then, in the same dazzling flash as when lightning illuminates a landscape, that I

saw what was lacking in my life, and who held the key to my happiness.

Simon.

Simon who had saved me from drowning. Simon who had helped me up the cliff. Simon who had danced with me at the ball when Rupert had forgotten my existence. Simon who had paid my wages; remembered my birthdays; added pieces to my collections; introduced me to many of my favourite authors; taught me to like the cool, pure notes of the flute; made me laugh; made unforgettable love to me.

My whirlwind entrance made my parents stare in astonishment. They were sitting on the sofa together; my mother darning a sock, my father watching the box. It was not Simon's living voice I had heard, but only the closing words of a recorded interview.

'What's happened? What's the matter?' asked Mother, as my face froze with disappointment.

'Nothing . . . nothing . . . I thought . . . Shall I make some coffee?'

Without waiting for her reply, I fled to the kitchen.

A few minutes later, by which time I was more collected, she joined me there. 'You thought Simon was in the house, didn't you?'

I nodded. 'How did you guess?'

'I've been hoping you would see the light about him one of these days. He's loved *you* for years.'

'For years?' I repeated incredulously. 'How do you know?'

'Oh, I've often seen him looking at you when he thought no one was watching him. When he was staying here last spring, I was dusting his room and, accidentally, I knocked a small leather wallet off the edge of the dressing-table. Inside there was a sort of plastic concertina to hold his AA card and so on. I couldn't help seeing that two of the pockets held snapshots of you. In my experience, young men don't carry pictures of girls unless they have a special regard for them.'

'You never told me.'

'I didn't feel it would be right to tell you at that time. It was something private which I wouldn't have seen except by chance, and if Simon had wanted you to know, he would have told you himself. Perhaps I shouldn't tell you now, but it's taken you so long to wake up from your daydreams about Rupert, and perhaps even Simon may not be prepared to wait indefinitely. Neglect can kill even the hardiest plants eventually.'

I was seized by a terrible panic that at this very moment another girl might be walking into Simon's life; a girl who wouldn't take years to

recognise the solid worth beneath his attractive exterior.

‘I’ll go and see him. I’ll go tomorrow. Mother, when did you first notice him looking at me? Can you remember?’

She reflected for some moments. ‘I believe it was at Rupert’s birthday ball. You were still on the plump side then, I remember, but everyone remarked how charming you looked in the dress you’d made. One could see what a lovely girl you were going to become in a year or two.’

‘Lovely? Me?’

She smiled. ‘One of your greatest charms is your lack of vanity, Andelys. Not everyone was mesmerised by Claudine that night, and Simon barely gave her a glance. He had eyes only for you, my dear – but you only had eyes for poor, weak, foolish Rupert,’ she added dryly.

‘Does Dad know all this?’

‘Yes, but you have to remember that your father is an islander born and bred, and the thought of his daughter being singled out by the Seigneur makes him see Rupert through somewhat rose-coloured glasses. Also from his point of view Simon is rather too footloose to make an ideal son-in-law. Remy would like to see his grandchildren growing up here, and indeed so should I. But even if marriage to Simon took you to the ends of the earth, I would still prefer him to Rupert.’

Presently I went upstairs to start packing. The first thing to catch my eye – although for weeks past I had not consciously noticed it – was the Victorian *carnet de bal* in which Simon had written *To Andelys, with love from Simon. June 1959.*

I had taken that ‘with love’ to mean no more than ‘with affection’. Even now I found it hard to believe that what it might really have meant was ‘with all my heart’. Could my mother have been mistaken in interpreting the looks Simon had given me? But even if she had, there was still the evidence of the photographs in his card-folder. Surely her conclusion must be correct? Surely no man carried about with him pictures of a girl he regarded as a sister merely?

That night, I lay awake until the small hours, combing past conversations for clues to support or disprove Mother’s belief that Simon loved me.

I remembered the curious oversight in the letter Miss Wallace had left for me. *There are two reasons why I think you should be told*, she had written, and then had omitted any mention of the second reason. She had known that I thought I loved Rupert. Had she also known that Simon loved me? I remembered her telling me once that she thought I was a little casual with him.

Above all, I remembered the night I had dined with him in London, and how he had said it

was a special occasion, but not because it was his birthday. Had he meant that my presence made it special? Had the golden thimble with the words *Gage de mon amitié* round the rim been truly a pledge of love?

My journey to London next day was complicated by one of the roughest crossings I could remember. How I wished I had travelled by air. Good sailor though I was usually, the gale made me glad to reach Weymouth. Not having lunched on the ferry, I had meant to eat on the train, but it turned out to have no restaurant car, and the length of the queue for the buffet made me decide not to bother.

We were late arriving in London, and I had a long wait for a taxi. But none of these mishaps really troubled me. I was buoyed up by the thought of seeing Simon.

Unexpectedly, the door of his flat was opened by a man with red hair and freckles.

‘Good evening,’ I said. ‘Is Simon in?’

‘No, I’m sorry, he’s not. He’s gone abroad. He left London the day before yesterday.’

Although it was not unforeseen, it was still a crushing disappointment.

‘I see. Do you know how long he’ll be away?’



‘Several months. It’s because it’s a long assignment that he’s let the flat to my wife and me.’

‘Several months! Where has he gone?’

‘He’s stopping off in Singapore en route, but he’s actually on his way to Vietnam.’

For the first time in my life I felt the ground heaving under my feet and everything fading out of focus. That I did not actually faint was thanks to the person who grabbed me as I began to sway, helped me to a chair and pushed my head between my knees. As the spinning sensation abated I heard the man say, ‘I thought it was too good to be true. Do you suppose we’re going to have a procession of Simon’s girl-friends passing out on us?’

‘Hush, Rob! Help me to get her into the sitting-room. No, not for a minute. She’s still very muzzy.’ The pleasant north country voice came close to my ear, and said quietly, ‘You’ll feel better in a minute, love. Don’t worry. We’ll look after you.’

I was on the sofa in the sitting-room by the time I was capable of taking in the owner of the voice. She was small and dark with red cheeks and kind blue eyes. She was not a pretty girl, but she had common sense and good humour in every line of her round, open-air face.

She said, ‘Have a cup of tea, love. I’d just made it when you rang the bell. Isn’t that lucky?’

There's nothing like tea for pulling you together after a woozy turn.'

She was right. Normally I didn't like tea, or take sugar in it. But a cup of hot, strong, sweet tea tasted wonderful to me just then.

While I was sipping it, she said, 'I'm Betty Bartlett. It was my husband, Rob, who opened the door to you. He and Simon have been friends since they were reporters on the *Journal* together.' She paused, studying me. 'I think you're Andelys, aren't you?'

'Yes, but how did you know?'

'Simon showed me a photo of you once. You've known each other for some time, I believe?'

'All our lives. We grew up together.'

'Oh, I didn't know it was as long as that.'

Her husband, who had left us, reappeared. 'The potatoes are done, Bet. Shall I drain them or leave them in the water?'

'Drain them for me, would you, love? I'll be there in a minute.' She turned her warm smile on me. 'There's plenty of supper for three, and I think a good meal is what you need. What have you had to eat today?'

'Not very much,' I admitted.

'I thought so. It's nearly always lack of food which makes healthy people feel faint.'

While we were eating they talked about their life in Yorkshire, and about the job as a

'sub' in Fleet Street which had brought Rob Bartlett to London. I forced myself to listen, and to eat the food Betty put in front of me, and not to think about Simon going to a war which already had cost so many lives.

It was when we had finished the meal that she asked me if I lived in London.

I shook my head. 'I've been in Carlou with my parents for a couple of months. I had a job there. But it's finished now, and I shan't go back to the island. I don't know yet what I'll do next.'

'Well, there's all tomorrow to think about that. What you need now is some sleep. It won't take five minutes to make up Simon's spare bed, and I'll give you a couple of tablets to help you get off. You won't know a thing until morning.'

'No, no, please - I couldn't think of staying here. You've been more than kind as it is. I shouldn't have any difficulty in getting into a hotel. I've imposed on you too much already.'

'Now don't start being daft,' she said firmly. 'You realise, I suppose, that if it weren't for Simon's kindness, we'd be living in some dreary digs out in the suburbs instead of in this lovely flat? *And* we had a job to persuade him to take any rent, didn't we, Rob? A fine return it would be if we let his girl waste her money on a hotel room when there's an empty bedroom right here.'

'But I'm not his girl,' I said huskily.

She chewed her lip for a moment. 'That depends on how you look at it. *You* may not feel you're his girl. But you would be if *he* had his way. He told me that the day he showed me your photo, and as far as I know he hasn't changed his mind since.'

'You must write to him,' said Betty, the next afternoon.

We were sitting in the pale winter sun in a sheltered corner of the roof garden. I had not woken until noon, but even after fourteen hours' sleep I still felt drained of vitality.

She fetched me a pad of airmail paper and a fountain pen, and then she went out to do some shopping. I must have written a dozen opening sentences, and then crumpled the sheets and tossed them aside, before I progressed to the second sentence. To write what was in my heart was impossible, for Simon might no longer wish to hear it. As Mother had said - Neglect can kill the hardiest plant. And weeks ago Simon himself had told me - I'm going to stop wasting my life by living on hope. By this time, for all I knew, his former feelings towards me might have withered and died as completely as mine towards Rupert.

At last, after about an hour of crossing out and rewriting, I felt, although not satisfied, that I could not improve what I had written, and I

copied it out on a fresh sheet of paper. Then I read it over.

*My dear Simon, I had begun,*

*You will probably be surprised to hear that I'm sitting in your roof garden. I came to see you because, although you didn't wish me to know, and Miss Wallace didn't wish me to mention it, she left me a letter explaining who was really responsible for my job with her. I wanted to tell you how grateful I am to you, but it seems it may be a long time before I shall see you again.*

*I don't know where I shall be by the time you come home. I went back to Carlou to help Rupert furnish the dower house, but I find I have changed too much during the years with Miss Wallace to be able to return there permanently. When Rupert asked me to marry him, I realised you were right when you told me that he and I were not suited. It's taken me a long time, but I think I have grown up at last.*

*We shall be very anxious about you until you come back safely. Probably you will be too busy to write to me as well as to the Bartletts, but I'll let you know my next address, and meanwhile I shall keep in touch with Rob and Betty, and hear your news from them. Take care  
- Andelys.*

It took me over a week of intensive flat-hunting to find a suitable place for myself; one large room and a tiny bathroom on the top floor

of a house in Pimlico. In another week it was habitable if not homely, and when my belongings had re-crossed the English Channel – how I regretted my precipitancy in having them shipped to Carlou – I felt I should be very comfortable.

The Bartletts did not want me to move until my things had come, but I felt they had put up with an interloper in their household for long enough. On the morning of the day I moved, the post included two letters from the Far East, one addressed to the Bartletts, the other to me.

My fingers shook with excitement as I slit the envelope, but my heart sank as I unfolded the letter and saw how brief was Simon's reply.

*My dear Andelys, he had written,*

*I was indeed surprised to hear your news. Miss Wallace seems to have exaggerated. There is no need for you to feel in any way beholden to me. My solicitor has instructions to arrange the return to you of the share of the sale of A.A. which Miss W. left to me. These things take time, but you can count on receiving the proceeds in full eventually.*

*I would counsel caution if you're thinking of setting up on your own. It might be better to invest your capital, and extend your experience with a spell in one of the big auction firms. Simon.*

When Betty had finished reading the much longer letter they had received from him, she looked up. 'He says "Keep an eye on Andelys until she finds her feet",' she told me, smiling.

I showed her his few lines to me. 'It could hardly be more guarded,' I said glumly.

'Guarded - yes. But not indifferent. He's still concerned for your welfare. Write to him again. Tell him about your flat,' she advised. 'His next reply may be more forthcoming. Who knows? He may have advised you against setting up shop because when he comes home he'll want your undivided attention.'

I was not convinced that she was right. It seemed to me, as I read and re-read his letter on my first night alone in my new home, that the message between the lines was one of courteous dismissal.

The next day I rented a small television set on which to watch Simon's reports, and I also began to look for a job. I had no luck when I followed his suggestion and inquired about vacancies at Christie's, Sotheby's and Bonhams.

That evening I wrote my second letter to him, describing the flat, if it could be called that, and telling him that I had tried three auctioneers without success, and tomorrow intended to start working my way round all the antique shops in the area.

I was lucky: a few days later I walked into a shop where the ring of the door-bell brought a thin, pale man mincing through the curtains which concealed an inner room. He was dressed in silver-grey to match his hair, with a stock instead of a tie, and a crystal quartz intaglio ring on the little finger of the hand with which he had swept aside the curtain.

‘Good morning. I’m looking for work. I’ve had four years’ training with one of the best dealers in Hampshire, and my special interests are needlework tools, embroideries and textiles.’

‘Indeed?’ he said, looking me over. ‘What can you tell me about that?’ with a flourish of the elegant hand.

By the greatest good fortune he was indicating a Staffordshire blue plate which I recognised as one of Laurence’s most treasured pieces.

‘May I?’ I picked it up and held it at eye-level so that the light showed the ripple in the pale blue glaze. The existence of the ripple was something known only to experienced dealers and collectors, and was a sure sign of an early, good quality piece.

Without looking at the back of the plate, I said, ‘I’d date this about 1815. It may not be marked, but it was probably made by one of the Swansea potteries, and the pattern is called The Ladies of Llangollen after two aristocratic blue-



stockings who caused rather a rumpus by running away from their families and setting up home together in Wales.'

He showed no sign of being impressed. 'What is your name?' he inquired.

'Andelys Brelade. The dealer who trained me was Miss Clementine Wallace, but she died recently and I'd like to work in London for a time. I've found a small flat quite near here.'

He continued to regard me with his pale grey, lizard-like eyes, sharply observant, not hostile, but not friendly either. I braced myself for a courteous but crushing rebuff.

Then, to my surprise, he smiled at me, and his manner changed from aloofness to a disconcerting cosiness. 'My dear Miss Brelade, this is *meant*. I knew the moment I looked at you. This young woman has been *sent*, I said to myself. Did you feel that as you came in? Did you sense you were *meant* to come here?'

'I'm not really sure, Mr - ?'

'Oh, forgive me: I'm Gilbert Kolinsky. My mother was a White Russian; of my father the less said the better. Perhaps you are not as sensitive to *influences* as I am. Never mind: the important thing is that you've come, and in the very nick of time, I may say. I have been distracted with worry. You see, my partner has been taken ill and may be in hospital for weeks, and it is just not possible to run this business

single-handed. But can one find an efficient assistant? One cannot. They are useless - absolutely useless. I had to sack the last one yesterday.'

By the end of the week, I seemed to have been working for Gilbert for months, and although I suspected that neither my parents nor Simon would approve of him, I found him perfectly congenial. He was an authority on Persian ceramics and Japanese objects of art, two fields in which I had everything to learn.

Had it not been for anxiety about Simon, I would have been reasonably happy that winter. Gilbert's shop attracted a colourful clientele who were a continual source of interest and amusement to me, particularly one or two of the fashionable decorators to whom he sold bizarre accent pieces for their schemes.

Simon's replies to my letters continued to be short and impersonal, but at least he replied, and although he did not always appear in his television reports from Vietnam, merely hearing his voice sustained me. The sight of his face would make my heart leap with longing.

A few nights before Christmas my fears for his safety were exacerbated by watching a report in which he was actually under fire. The real thing was very different from the mock heroics of Hollywood in which war correspondents dodged bullets with every hair in

place. Simon's dark face glistened with sweat, and he gripped the microphone with a hand which shook. He was plainly afraid in a situation in which only a fool would not be afraid, but he and his unseen colleague behind the camera completed their account of the street battle in spite of the barrage of firing which frequently made Simon flinch and the film shake and blur momentarily.

I spent Christmas with the Bartletts and their friends, outwardly cheerful, inwardly haunted by the war on the other side of the world.

One night in January I went to a private view with Gilbert and returned home five minutes too late to see the beginning of Simon's programme. Not greatly concerned, because his contribution did not usually come first, I switched on the set and sat down to unzip my boots.

The sound came on before the picture, and to my horror I heard the link man praising the courage of the cameraman with whom Simon had worked. The subdued tone of voice was unmistakably that of someone paying a posthumous tribute.

The telephone rang. Dazedly, I picked up the receiver and heard Betty's voice say, 'I'm coming over at once.'

It might have been an hour or only ten minutes before she arrived. For me time had

stopped. Life had stopped. Without Simon, what future was there? Like Miss Wallace when James had been killed, I had now only the past to remember.

Two lines from *Richard II*, the play I had read for my O level, came into my mind. *O, call back yesterday, bid time return . . . today, today, unhappy day, too late.*

Betty, when I opened the door to her, said, 'I've telephoned Rob and asked him to get some more details. They've a flap on tonight, but he'll do his best. Try not to worry, Anny love; it may not be as bad as it sounds. Simon's a tough nut, you know. He won't give up the ghost without a struggle.'

I stared at her. 'Do you mean he isn't dead?' I grasped her by the arms in a frenzy of renewed hope. 'I came in a few minutes late. I didn't hear all the details. What did they say about Simon? Tell me . . . tell me quickly!'

'He's alive. He's not dead. But he's seriously wounded,' she said. 'He may lose a leg. It was the other poor man who was killed outright.'

When we knew for certain that Simon would survive his injuries, although it might be a long time before he recovered from them, I began to write to him every day. It was tantamount to telling him I loved him, but it spared him the

awkwardness of having to repulse a direct declaration.

For some time I didn't know if he was able to read my letters or to have them read to him, but at last I received an answer which was markedly warmer in tone than his previous notes to me, and which encouraged me to continue my daily bulletins.

*My dear Simon,*

*A most peculiar and somewhat sinister character came into the shop today . . .*

*My dear Simon,*

*I had supper with the Bartletts last night. Betty made a delicious lasagne, and we drank to your return . . .*

*My dear Simon,*

*I have fallen for a rather rude ivory needle-case in the form of a buxom naked lady. I think she is a rarity, so I paid an exorbitant price, and must now decide what to weed out to pay for her . . .*

In his replies, Simon was so evasive about his health that I felt it would be a long time before he was fit to come home. March was cold and wet with no hint of spring in the weather. One day Betty telephoned the shop and said, 'This endless rain is depressing me. Come and eat with me tonight, will you? Come straight from the shop.'

When I arrived at the flat, she answered the door with her coat. 'We've run out of vino,' she explained. 'I'm just nipping round to the off-licence. I shan't be ten minutes. Make yourself at home.'

I shed my coat and my boots in the lobby, and walked into the sitting-room in stockinged feet. There was a new *Vogue* on the sofa, and I sat down and picked it up, thinking of Simon, wondering how he was getting on.

'Hello, Andelys.'

At the sound of that voice, I jumped nearly out of my skin.

He was standing on the threshold of the archway which led to the bedrooms. He was thinner than the last time I had seen him, and he looked very tired, and much older. As I gazed at him, speechless with joy, he came forward into the room and I saw that he walked with a stick. His left leg was stiff at the knee. As he passed the end of the sofa, the light from the lamp showed the scars on his temple and cheek.

He stopped about three yards away, and we looked at each other in silence. I could hardly believe he was real. I had thought him on the far side of the world, still weak from his wounds, not likely to come home for many weeks. But suddenly here he was, alive, and whole, and safe from the hideous holocaust which had so nearly destroyed him.

‘A lot of water has passed under the bridge since you and I were last in this room,’ Simon said quietly.

‘Yes. It seems aeons ago. It’s . . . it’s wonderful to have you back.’

Wonderful . . . marvellous . . . unbelievable. None of those words came anywhere near to expressing what I felt as I looked at him. ‘My dear Simon’ whom now, for the very first time, I was seeing with the eyes of love.

‘It’s pretty good to *be* back. There were moments when I thought I might not make it,’ he said, on a wry note.

It was at that point that I cast aside the conventions which make the British stiffen their upper lips when their hearts are bursting with emotion, and girls pretend to be cool with men whom secretly they adore.

‘Oh, Simon, I’ve missed you so badly!’ I sprang to my feet and crossed the short distance between us, and flung my arms round his neck.

The walking stick fell to the floor as he drew me painfully close. We didn’t kiss. It was enough to stand there, locked together, like two parts of an object which has been broken and the pieces lost, but which still make a perfect whole when they are found and restored to each other.

At last Simon said, ‘I didn’t intend to do this.’

I raised my face to look at him. 'Why not? If you still love me.' And I had no more doubts that he did.

'I don't think you've realised yet that I'm not as fit as I used to be.'

'Oh, heavens - your leg. I'm so sorry, I forgot. Come and sit down and rest it. It is still your real leg, presumably? You couldn't possibly be walking on a false one as soon as this, could you?'

'No, it's still a flesh and blood leg, but the knee isn't much good any more.' He lowered himself on to the sofa with his right leg bent normally and his left leg straight. 'Nor is it pleasant to look at,' he added, with a frowning glance at me.

'And you seriously thought I might mind? Well, I suppose I don't deserve much confidence, considering how long it took me to realise that you were worth ten of most of the men in the world.'

'No, I didn't think you'd mind the look of it too much, but there are other considerations, Andelys. A man shouldn't ask a girl to marry him if he can't be sure of looking after her properly, and at present my prospects aren't anything like as good as they were a year ago. Not only because I'm less fit, but because my objectives have changed. I don't want to continue in



television. I want to do something quite different.'

I found it hard to take a deep interest in his prospects just then. Things like food and clothes and a roof over one's head seemed pleasant but unnecessary luxuries. The only absolute necessities were air to breathe and Simon close enough to touch. I didn't want to talk about the future. It was enough to savour the present; to feast my eyes on that strong, haggard face, and the fine grey eyes meeting mine with such a grave, troubled look.

I touched his scars with my fingertips, and he turned his mouth into my palm. I saw in his eyes the first flicker of the blaze which had flared up between us the last time we sat on this sofa. But evidently he was determined to keep it under control until he had finished saying his piece.

'I've spent the best part of ten years recording all the bad news in the world,' he told me. 'After a time one sickens of it and comes to realise that the people who live in the limelight – politicians and interviewers and so on – are not really at the centre of things. They only think they are. I want to spend the next decade celebrating the good news. I'm not sure yet how to do it, but I mean to begin by getting away from the city and using the skills I learned as a boy on the island. I'm going to buy a boat, and

live on it, and eat a lot of fish, and listen to music, and fill some large gaps in my education. After a while I hope I'll write something less ephemeral than journalism and television reports. But I doubt if I'll make much money at it, and it won't be a very settled life.'

'I don't think I need a settled life. I've discovered that what is important is to have some lovely old things which one takes wherever one goes, and they are what home really means. One's treasures, and the person one loves most - although that's the wrong order, actually,' I added, smiling at him.

He kissed me then, and after a while I asked him, 'Why did it go wrong before? Why didn't you tell me you loved me?'

'I expect I would have done if it hadn't been for that so-and-so telephone call. I should have told them to go to hell. But in a way perhaps the call came at the right moment. The situation was fairly out of hand, if you remember. I hadn't meant to make love to you, and when I looked at your face after the call came, I could see that all I had done was to make you aware of certain depths of feeling in yourself. You hadn't responded to me. You'd been wishing I were Rupert.'

'He never made me feel like that.'

'He touched your heart. I touched only your senses,' said Simon. 'Which is not very difficult if

a girl is young and inexperienced, and a man is not. But I wanted you to love me.'

'Which I do. Better late than never.'

We began to laugh from sheer happiness.

I said, 'I suppose what confused the issue for me was that I'd always liked you so much, and somehow I hadn't grasped that loving and liking are contiguous. I'd thought love was something quite separate.'

'No, I think the kind of love which lasts people all their lives is really a perfect form of friendship,' Simon said thoughtfully. And then he looked at me, and laughed, and said, 'Enough of this philosophising - '

## ENVOI

1976

This summer, after an absence of eleven years, Simon and I returned to Carlou. My mother and father had paid several visits to us, flying to where we were berthed and staying on board the *Andelys* with us. But for the first three years after our marriage we did not go back to the island, because I felt it was unkind to parade our happiness before Rupert, and unkind still to go back but to avoid seeing him.

However, in 1966 Rupert married again, and within a year Peter had an infant stepsister. Eighteen months later a baby boy arrived, and in 1970 Joanna Fontaine had her third child and, on the far side of the world, I gave birth to twins whom we called Remy, after my father, and Rosa, after Clementine Rosa Wallace.

I did not admit it until later, but before the children were born I had never felt any great urge to start a family. Simon gave me everything I needed, and although he was often totally absorbed in his work, I was never bored or restless because I could become equally preoccupied with the design and execution of my needlework. Later I discovered that he had not

particularly wanted children either, but had thought I must be longing for a baby even if I never mentioned it. However, once the twins were born, our initial lack of enthusiasm quickly came to an end and we loved our offspring as much as the most eager parents-to-be.

Their coming did not greatly change our ways. Swimming before they could walk, tethered by life-lines in their toddling stage, and as used to wearing life jackets as land-bred children were to wearing cardigans, Remy and Rosa accepted a seafaring life as the natural order of things.

They were born in Hawaii, and four years afterwards we explored the Pacific islands, and had a look at New Zealand where at one time Simon had thought of settling. But at heart we were Europeans, and in the end we were drawn back by the Old World, and particularly the 'lands of summer' surrounding the Mediterranean where we had spent our first blissful years together.

We put into Carlou harbour on a calm, warm evening, late in June. As Simon made fast I remembered all the other times I had stepped ashore here; coming home from school in Guernsey, coming back from my first visit to London, returning for the first time after going to work for Miss Wallace, coming back because Dina had been killed and Rupert might need me.

How long, long ago all those earlier homecomings seemed.

The lapse of time was emphasised by the many changes which had taken place during our absence, and although Mother had described these changes in her letters to me, it was one thing to read about changes and another to see them with one's own eyes. We knew that the conversion of Le Manoir into a hotel had proved a most prosperous undertaking, but had not visualised what a much gayer atmosphere had been created in the village by the building, with traditional materials, of the Dolphin Tavern, and the shops for a potter, a silversmith and a weaver.

My parents, now in their sixties, had sold Le Colombier and moved to a cottage overlooking the harbour. My mother kept busy and supplemented their savings by making pâtés and quiches for the cold table at the Dolphin. My father, too, had found a new and lucrative interest. Equipped with a small lathe, he made miniature furniture to the scale of one inch to the foot. Some of his early pieces had caught the eye of a guest at Le Manoir who turned out to be the editor of an American magazine for people with a passion for dolls' houses. As a result of her interest, father had a waiting list for tiny Pembroke tables and chiffoniers copied from pictures in various of my reference books left

behind because there had not been room for them aboard the *Andelys*.

My parents were enchanted by the twins, whom they had never seen except in photographs, and the twins were equally delighted by their first experience of grandparental spoiling.

The day after our return we lunched at the dower house, now known as La Petite Seigneurie. The Fontaines had known of our coming, and had arranged the luncheon party with my mother.

I knew before I met her that Joanna Fontaine was some years older than Rupert, and the antithesis of Dina. She turned out to be a tall, strapping, plain woman of forty with whom, as we shook hands, I felt I should have nothing in common. But the first things I noticed in her drawing-room were half a dozen canvas work cushions of traditional designs carried out in modern colours with some imaginative contrasts of stitch-texture, although hard-wearing tent stitch predominated. These were her work, and I found she was actually a much less no-nonsense personality than she looked. Rupert was obviously devoted to her.

Once or twice, during lunch, I caught him eyeing me, and I smiled and he smiled back. I suspect he was thinking, as I was, what a good thing it was that our adolescent romance had not lasted.

We had met the children before lunch, but they and the twins ate somewhere else. They were Emma, who was eight, and Christabel, a few months older than the twins. Both girls resembled their father, but Joanna's son, six-year-old Helier, took after her.

Peter Fontaine was fifteen now, and at school on the mainland. I had wondered if his situation as the son of someone who had brought nothing but discredit to the family must be an uncomfortable one. But both his father and stepmother referred with pride to his prowess on the playing fields and academically. Evidently he had inherited his mother's quick brain but not the shiftless streak which had cancelled Dina's intelligence. After lunch, Joanna showed me the house and I noticed that on her dressing-table she kept a photograph of Peter as well as of her own children. He had changed a great deal and the resemblance to his mother, so marked in his early years, had now faded.

Joanna saw me studying his face, and said affectionately, 'He's so good with the others in spite of the age-gap between them. For some reason we never understood, Emma used to be frightened of the water, and it was only because Pete was endlessly patient with her that eventually she learned to swim, and now loves it as much as the others.'



That she called him Pete was as significant as the fact that she spoke well of him, I thought. She might feel the latter to be her duty, but the shortened form of his name almost certainly betokened genuine fondness,

When I mentioned this to Simon later, he said, 'Yes, I agree with that theory, although when Rupert introduced you to Joanna as "Anny" it didn't increase my affection for him, I can tell you.'

'Everyone has always called me that, except you, darling. Oh, Simon – look at that!'

The twins were at the cottage with their grandparents and he and I were having a drink in the grassed courtyard outside the Dolphin, and watching holidaymakers stroll down the hill to catch the five o'clock boat to Guernsey.

At another table in the courtyard an elderly woman was holding against herself a guernsey she had obviously just bought at the island's knitwear shop. It was a child's guernsey, and she looked to be consulting her companion as to whether it was the right size for its recipient. But what had caught my attention was its colour, not traditional navy blue but bright red, like the guernsey my mother had persuaded Grand'mère Bonamy to knit for Dina.

'Good heavens! That was twenty-two years ago,' I said wonderingly, after some mental calculations.

Simon was looking blank. I explained my thoughts to him. 'Of course it was just a lucky guess, but Grand'mère Bonamy was right when she prophesied there would never be another ball at Le Manoir,' I said. 'I'm glad Peter Fontaine isn't a misfit. It sounds as if he's inherited more than his name from his maternal grandfather. If he does well in life and eventually becomes the Seigneur, at least poor Dina will have lived to some good purpose.'

'One could say that of her, whatever Peter makes of his future,' was Simon's comment.

'What do you mean?'

'But for Dina's intervention, you would have married Rupert. Probably he would have been as contented as he is now, but I don't believe you would have been happy with him for long, and I should have had to remain a miserable bachelor. Joanna might have missed the boat, too. She's a nice woman but no oil painting. Probably Rupert wouldn't have taken much notice of her had he not had a sharp object lesson in the fact that a kind heart is not only more than a coronet but more than a pretty face as well.'

'Mm, I suppose you're right. Because of Dina, four people are happier than they might have been. But I don't think you would have remained a bachelor for long. Any woman would be happy with you, and you could have had your pick,' I replied.

I was serious, but he thought I was teasing, and teased me in turn by saying, with a naughty twinkle, 'Very true. I'm glad you appreciate your luck, woman.'

The next day, leaving the twins behind, we flew to London, where we found even more startling changes. Collecting seemed to have become a national mania, judging by the number of antique markets which had sprung up, full of objects which Miss Wallace and I would never have included in our stock. The prices made my eyes pop. I looked at a Bonzo-dog teapot stand, an unlovely relic of the Thirties, and thought that only a lunatic would part with several pounds for it.

We spent the night with the Bartletts, who were living in a net-curtained, semi-detached house in Rickmansworth. It was not a relaxed reunion because life had dealt less kindly with them than with us.

The newspaper on which Rob had been working at the time Simon lent them his flat had subsequently ceased publication. Eventually Rob had managed to find another job behind the scenes in television, but it seemed to be a post fraught with insecurity and vicious office politics. Rob, in his trendy clothes, with his bushy sideburns, too-long black hair and carefully camouflaged bald patch, was a different man

from the straightforward north country journalist I remembered.

They had had no children, and Betty went out to work now to help them keep pace with the cost of outer-London living. But although their conversation hinged on money, or rather their lack of it, I felt they were suffering less from the effects of inflation than from distorted values. There was not one object or picture in their home which I could admire with sincerity, but when Betty remarked that they could not afford the nice things Simon had had in his flat, I could not help thinking that for the price of their large colour television, and the freezer cabinet in the garage, and the lavishly stocked Jacobethan drinks cupboard, I could have furnished their sitting-room with beautiful things and created an atmosphere of serenity.

Next morning Rob drove us back to central London in an expensive car which to him was clearly an important status symbol. He and Betty had been surprised to learn that we were spending the next two nights not at one of London's great hotels but at a modest establishment.

'If I were in Rob's shoes, I'd hotfoot it back north. He could be editing a weekly and leading a civilised life,' said Simon, when we were alone.

On our own, we recovered quickly from the depressing effect of their company. They had

told us what it cost to eat in the West End now, and as Simon was having lunch with his publisher, we decided not to dine out but to picnic in our hotel room. I would buy the food, and Simon would provide something to drink.

Had Gilbert Kolinsky still been in London I should have visited him, but he and his partner had retired to Tangier, so I spent the day pottering in shops and art galleries.

I had had a cold shower and was trying on a short white voile nightdress patterned with sprays of cornflowers when Simon returned with two bottles of wine in a bag, and a bunch of white carnations for me.

'Is that all you bought for yourself? A chain store nightie?' he asked presently, when he had shed his unaccustomed city suit and cooled off in the shower.

'I didn't really need this, but it was pretty and you'd said I could splurge a bit. I did see a rather lovely pen and wash drawing, but wasn't sure you would like it. Could we look at it tomorrow?'

'Of course.'

'I missed you today, Simon. It sounds absurd. We were only apart for a few hours. I suppose it was largely because I don't feel at home here any more.'

'Nor do I. In fact unless you're particularly keen to go to a theatre tomorrow night, I thought

we might see if we can get on the afternoon flight. I must be getting old. London is too hot and dusty and crowded for me now.'

But he didn't look old as, with only a towel round his hips, he uncorked the wine. At thirty-eight he still looked as lithe and fit as he had when I had called at his flat and he had answered the door with his black hair wet and his shoulders glistening.

After we had picnicked on camembert, crispbreads and grapes, we spent the evening drinking wine and discussing the future. We had already agreed that the next ten years would have to be spent ashore while the children were educated.

'How do you like the idea of settling in France for a few years?' Simon asked me. 'We both speak passable French, and I am half-French, although I think of myself as British. It would have the advantage that the twins would grow up bilingual.'

I considered the idea. 'What part of France had you in mind?'

He shrugged. 'One of the more rural areas. Nowhere industrialised. I feel a small country town is the right setting for us. But not if it doesn't appeal to you.'

'Darling Simon, before we were married I told you that all I needed was you and a few

personal treasures. Now my formula includes the children, but otherwise it hasn't changed.'

He raised his glass to me. 'To one of the last unliberated women. I wonder if Remy will be as lucky as I am? Or if by the time he reaches manhood the contented wife will be an extinct species?'

'Not if Remy grows up to be like you. If a man wants the kind of woman who will follow him to the world's end, he has to be the kind of man who might go to the world's end. It's as simple as that.'